



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

TUESDAY — 23 Nov 2021



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	11/23 France PM singled out after positive test
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/french-pm-singled-ire-testing-covid-positive-81348097

GIST	<p>PARIS -- The prime minister of France, who tested positive for COVID-19 Monday, is being singled out on social media and beyond as the prime example of what not to do in the pandemic.</p> <p>Multiple videos are being circulated widely of a maskless Jean Castex vigorously shaking hands with elected officials in an enclosed space at a Paris mayoral congress on Nov. 16. Angry users are pointing out that that goes against the official line that everyone should continue taking preventative measures.</p> <p>They also noted that Castex had called French territory Guadeloupe “irresponsible” in the enforcement of COVID measures when he cannot abide by the rules himself.</p> <p>Gabriel Attal, the French government’s spokesman, had leaped to Castex’s defense at the time the video first began circulating. “We are all only human,” he said.</p> <p>But the Castex's positive test is a potential embarrassment for the French government and President Emmanuel Macron ahead of April’s presidential election.</p> <p>Castex’s office says the 52-year-old was infected by his 11-year-old daughter and is self-isolating for 10 days.</p> <p>It’s unclear if Castex, who was double vaccinated in the spring, has symptoms.</p> <p>Experts are saying that Castex's behavior is indicative more widely of a drop in vigilance now that most of the population has received vaccine shots.</p> <p>A prominent government figure, Labor Minister Elisabeth Borne, warned against complacency this month, acknowledging that “maybe we have lapsed a bit, barrier measures are being less respected.”</p> <p>Mask sales have fallen in France by three quarters in the year up to August 2021.</p> <p>But for the moment French media are concentrating their ire on Castex, pointing out that this is the fourth time that Castex has been a “contact case” for the virus, though he has never previously tested positive.</p> <p>As a result of his positive test, several French ministers are self-isolating awaiting test results, including Europe Minister Clement Beaune. Beaune also received criticism for deleting a photo on Instagram of him laughing and leaning in to Castex without wearing a mask.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Iran nuke program: threat of Israel strike
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-59322152
GIST	<p>In the turquoise waters of the Red Sea, Israeli, Emirati and Bahraini naval forces for the first time just days ago rehearsed joint security operations with a US warship.</p> <p>It followed a war-game at a desert airbase just north of the Israeli port city of Eilat last month, which sent fighter planes from Israel and seven other countries roaring into the skies.</p> <p>Such drills aim to send a strong warning to Iran, which has recently been holding its own large military exercises, and stress strategic alliances.</p> <p>But they come at a time when many in Israel are worrying about whether this small country could soon feel forced to act alone to attack Iran's nuclear programme militarily.</p> <p>The government has allocated \$1.5bn (£1.1bn) to prepare the Israeli armed forces for a potential strike against Iranian nuclear sites, and there are near-daily warnings from political and military leaders.</p>

"Israel has no interest in a war with Iran, but we will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons," an Israeli security official tells me. "In light of Iranian progress of their nuclear programme, we are preparing for all options and scenarios, including military capabilities."

The sabre-rattling comes as talks between Iran and five world powers (plus the US indirectly) on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - are due to resume in the Austrian capital Vienna on 29 November.

The JCPOA limited Iran's nuclear activities and opened its facilities up to enhanced inspections in return for the partial lifting of international sanctions. However, it was abandoned by US President Donald Trump in 2018, with Israel's approval.

Just as the date for a new round of talks was fixed, Iran declared it had produced 25kg of uranium enriched to 60% purity - just below the level that would be needed for a nuclear bomb - and more than 210kg enriched to 20%.

While Tehran continues to insist its intentions are peaceful, even Iranian experts have pointed out that such quantities of highly-enriched uranium were previously only held by nuclear armed states.

"The Iranians today are closer to creating fissile material for nuclear weapons than they ever were in the past," the Israeli security official says. "This fact has significant security implications for the State of Israel."

The Israeli defence establishment estimates that if Iran decided to do so, it could now accumulate enough enriched uranium for one nuclear weapon within a month.

The manufacture of such a weapon would also require making a warhead that could be mounted on a ballistic missile. The timeframe for that is more difficult to calculate, but some experts say it could take 18 to 24 months.

Israel, which is assumed to have its own nuclear weapons but maintains an official policy of deliberate ambiguity, views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat; Iran does not recognise the Israeli state and its officials often espouse a belief that it will eventually cease to exist.

While the US and Arab Gulf countries, with which Israel has burgeoning ties, are also deeply opposed to Iran having nuclear weapons, it is not clear to what extent their own interests would hold them back from helping in any military confrontation.

Clock ticking

Former Israeli National Security Adviser Yaakov Amidror, who is now a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, first warned of the dangers of Iran's nuclear ambitions in the early 1990s, when he worked in military intelligence.

He has a bleak assessment of the latest developments.

"Israel cannot live with a situation in which the Iranians are getting closer and closer to the bomb, and it will soon have to make a decision how to stop it," he says.

"I don't see any other way but to bomb it, because I don't see the Iranians retreating from their dream of having a nuclear umbrella under which they can be even more aggressive than they are today."

Israel has twice acted alone to destroy its enemies' nuclear reactors - in Iraq in 1981, and in 2007 in Syria - with little retaliation.

But many analysts question whether it is capable of effectively mounting a complex operation to stop Iran's much more advanced nuclear programme, which involves multiple sites with some underground facilities, and what price it would have to pay.

"Everyone in Israel understands that [a strike] might lead to a very complicated war," concedes Mr Amidror.

Iran has pledged "a shocking response" to any such attack. It is assumed it would use its own forces and co-ordinate with its well-armed proxies spread across the region: Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has tens of thousands of rockets, Shia militias in Syria and Iraq, Yemen's rebel Houthi movement, and Islamic Jihad militants in the Gaza Strip.

An Israel-Iran war would almost certainly also involve pro-Iranian militant groups from around the region. Despite the grave risks, some hawks in Israel calculate that a strike could be worthwhile, even if it only set back Iranian nuclear plans by a few years.

But the official preference is still promoting peaceful, negotiated solutions.

"I hope that the diplomatic channel will succeed," says Sima Shine, a former head of research for the Mossad intelligence agency, "but I don't give it a high chance right now."

US President Joe Biden's administration has proposed to Iran a straightforward return to "mutual compliance" with the JCPOA, but Israel's government opposes that.

The deal lifts many restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme as soon as 2025 and did not put limits on Iran's ballistic missile development or curb its support for militant groups across the region.

"My evaluation of Iran's position is that it actually does not want to go back," says Ms Shine, who now heads the Iran programme at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

"What they would like to see, of course, is a reduction of sanctions and they understand that they have to pay something in order to get it. The question is what is the calculus of Iran - how deeply does its economy need relief?"

Her fear is that nuclear talks could just be a way of biding for time, as the country allows its increasingly advanced centrifuges to keep spinning, building up stockpiles of enriched uranium.

Covert actions

Another veteran Iran specialist, Alex Vatanka at the Middle East Institute in Washington, emphasises Tehran's deep ideological commitment to its nuclear programme.

But despite its mistrust of the Europeans and the US, he believes Iran does want to come back to the JCPOA to ease domestic economic pressures; he sees its recent actions and demands as "strengthening its hand".

Iranian officials have spoken of Iran's nuclear programme as a matter of national pride. Mr Vatanka theorises that Iran does not necessarily want nuclear arms.

"It's an option they would like to have, clearly, but it's not about weaponising," he says, suggesting Iran could stay on the nuclear threshold.

"It's about Iran being a crucial nuclear state and making the point to the Americans that regime change is not going to happen."

Israel's threats of a strike do not convince him. He suggests that its clandestine efforts could be more effective at holding up Iran's nuclear progress.

"They have proven they can do that," Mr Vatanka comments. "Iran is clearly totally infiltrated at a high level. There's definitely a flow of information that they have."

A decade ago, there were [reports of a co-ordinated US-Israeli attack involving the use of the Stuxnet computer virus to disrupt the Iranian nuclear programme](#).

More recently, Iran has blamed Israel for the dramatic assassination of its top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who was shot dead near Tehran with an AI-assisted, remote-controlled machine gun, and damaging explosions at its nuclear facilities.

Iran said an explosion at its Natanz nuclear facility in July 2020 was the result of "sabotage" As part of what it terms its "war between the wars" Israel has also carried out hundreds of military strikes to reduce Iranian entrenchment in neighbouring Syria and the movement of precision guided munitions to Hezbollah.

Proliferation fear

Although there are many differences among experts about what will happen next, there is a consensus that upcoming talks on Iran's nuclear plans come at a critical time and that the stakes for this volatile region could not be higher.

If Iran develops its own nuclear arsenal, other powers - Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt - are likely to follow suit.

Washington has said it wants to end "forever wars" in the Middle East. But it has also warned that it will look at "other options" when it comes to Iran, and it too has been seen flexing its military muscle.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Hong Kong jails student activist 43months
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/article/hong-kong-security-law-speech.html
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — A Hong Kong court on Tuesday sentenced a student activist to three years and seven months in prison for secession and money laundering, in the latest example of a powerful national security law being used to criminalize speech and stifle dissent.</p> <p>The student, Tony Chung, 20, is the third person, and the youngest, to be sentenced under the security law, which Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in June 2020. Prosecutors had accused him of promoting independence for Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese territory, on social media and through activities run by a now-defunct activism group, Studentlocalism. The money laundering charge stemmed from donations he received in support of the group.</p> <p>Mr. Chung pleaded guilty to the secession and money laundering charges earlier this month, and the court chose not to proceed with two related charges.</p> <p>"I have no shame in my heart," Mr. Chung said when pleading guilty, before being warned by the judge, Stanley Chan, not to make any "political declaration."</p> <p>Many of the social media posts the prosecution pointed to were written before enactment of the security law, which is not supposed to be retroactive. But prosecutors argued they were important context for Mr. Chung's continued activism last year.</p> <p>Dozens of leading activists have been convicted of illegal assembly, including seven who were sentenced in October to prison terms of up to a year for a demonstration on July 1, 2020.</p> <p>The security law, however, goes far beyond previous statutes in that it provides a powerful new tool to clamp down on dissent. Here is why it is different, and what other cases are expected to be brought.</p>

What does the new ruling say?

Mr. Chung is the third defendant to be sentenced under the security law. The first, Tong Ying-kit, was [convicted in July of terrorism and inciting secession](#) after he crashed his motorcycle into police officers while carrying a flag with a slogan that, a court ruled, was a call for separating Hong Kong from China. Mr. Tong, a former restaurant worker, [was sentenced to nine years in prison](#).

Earlier this month, another activist, Ma Chun-man, was sentenced to five years and nine months in prison for inciting subversion, after shouting pro-independence slogans at a series of protests.

Unlike the first trial, which covered both an act of speech and an act of violence, Mr. Ma was charged purely because of the words he said and displayed on signs in peaceful protests and interviews over the past year.

His chanted slogans included “Hong Kong people, establish our state” and “Hong Kong independence: The only way out.” Another of his slogans, “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times,” was the same one that Mr. Tong was convicted of using.

The origins of the national security law

Beijing enacted the law at the end of June 2020 after a year of widespread protests in Hong Kong. A previous push for the city to put its own security legislation in place was dropped after a mass demonstration in 2003.

China’s central government then took up the initiative, secretly drafting the law it imposed on Hong Kong.

What makes it different?

The security law introduces some elements of China’s socialist legal system to Hong Kong’s common law system. More than a year after the statute was unveiled, the system is still being worked out, but some elements are clear.

The law targets terrorism, subversion, secession and collusion with foreign forces. Its language is broad and carries many changes to Hong Kong’s legal system. It sets up an extensive infrastructure in the city, including a security committee that includes Hong Kong’s chief executive and Beijing’s top representative. China’s security forces are allowed to operate openly in Hong Kong for the first time.

Perhaps the most significant elements are the changes to the city’s judiciary.

Hong Kong’s chief executive now selects the judges who are allowed to handle security cases. The power to interpret the law has been given to the central Chinese government — meaning Hong Kong’s courts have little ability to moderate it. Complicated cases can now be tried in mainland China, although that provision has yet to be used.

The law now makes it much harder for defendants to be granted bail, and most of the 100 people who have been charged under the measure remain in jail. The vast majority of those charged have been accused of speech crimes, including saying or writing things judged to be calling for Hong Kong independence or actions by other countries, such as sanctions by the United States, deemed harmful to Hong Kong.

What have been its effects?

The security law has helped curb protests in Hong Kong and has [silenced much of the outspoken dissent](#) that was once commonplace here.

Most leading activists are either in custody or in exile. Others have censored what they say publicly. Dozens of civil society groups, including protest organizers and pro-democracy unions, have shut down because they have become the subjects of national security investigations or fear their work would make them a target.

One of the city's largest newspapers, Apple Daily, [was forced to close](#) in June after the authorities froze its bank accounts, and several top editors and executives were arrested in a national security investigation.

Film censorship has increased, and new rules are expected to pass this year allowing the authorities to retroactively ban movies that had previously been approved.

Pro-government politicians have warned that [some works of art](#) at the city's new M+ museum could violate the security law. Some books have also been scrutinized, and members of a speech therapists union have been charged with [publishing seditious materials in children's books](#) that portrayed security forces as wolves.

How has the rest of the world responded?

The United States and other Western governments have sharply criticized the security law, and several, like [Australia](#), halted extradition agreements with Hong Kong. The United States also imposed sanctions on several [Hong Kong](#) and [Chinese central government officials](#) over the crackdown in Hong Kong. China has retaliated with sanctions on Americans, including Wilbur Ross, the former commerce secretary.

China has shrugged off foreign criticism of the security law, which it says has brought needed stability to Hong Kong after years of unrest. Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, [in an interview broadcast in October by the Hong Kong public broadcaster RTHK](#), said that the city's international reputation had been damaged by mischaracterizations of the law.

"Hong Kong's international reputation has suffered some damage because many foreign politicians, organizations and Western media have amplified the idea that the correct enforcement of the national security law is equivalent to suppressing human rights and freedom," she said.

"The Hong Kong government has to do more explaining in this regard."

What trials come next?

This fall, Hong Kong courts are expected to try [Jimmy Lai, the founder of Apple Daily](#), and other top editors and executives from his company on security law charges that accuse them of colluding with foreign forces by appealing to the United States to enact sanctions against Hong Kong.

Three others have pleaded guilty to national security charges, including the activist Andy Li and the paralegal Chan Tsz-wah, who are expected to testify in Mr. Lai's trial.

The largest single case under the law involves [47 politicians and activists](#) who have been charged with conspiracy to commit subversion for a campaign platform that called for blocking the Hong Kong government's agenda and forcing Mrs. Lam to step down.

They are expected to go on trial this year. Their bail hearings in March lasted so long that some defendants were hospitalized with exhaustion, prompting criticism from legal experts about the disorderly process.

Since the protests began in mid-June 2019 the police have arrested more than 10,000 people, and more than 2,700 of them have been prosecuted. Mrs. Lam said this month that Hong Kong would build a "mega courtroom" to handle the city's shortage of court space.

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HEADLINE	11/23 US to open strategic oil reserves
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/business/news-business-stock-market#biden-oil-reserves-gas-prices
GIST	WASHINGTON — President Biden will release oil from the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve as Americans face rising gas prices amid a jump in inflation ahead of the holiday season, according to senior administration officials.

	<p>The administration will tap into 50 million barrels of the crude oil in a coordinated release of oil reserves with Britain, China, India, Japan and Korea in an effort to combat soaring global prices on oil.</p> <p>The Department of Energy's release of the reserves, which is set to be announced Mr. Biden on Tuesday afternoon, is meant to address fluctuations in supply and demand for oil, administration officials said.</p> <p>Demand for oil fell precipitously in the early months of the pandemic, so the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other oil-producing nations cut production. In the United States, reduced demand led to a substantial decline in drilling; the country's oil rig count was down nearly 70 percent in summer 2020.</p> <p>President Biden has previously called on OPEC Plus, the name for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries along with Russia and some other countries, to increase their scheduled production increases, but has been rebuffed.</p> <p>The move to tap into U.S. stockpile of crude, the largest in the world with 620 million barrels of oil, was also a way for the president to show the administration's focus on rising gas prices that have stroked anxiety among Americans amid declining approval numbers for the administration.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Europe: cases rise, economic toll returns
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#as-virus-cases-rise-in-europe-an-economic-toll-returns
GIST	<p>Europe's already fragile economic recovery is at risk of being undermined by a fourth wave of coronavirus infections now spreading on the continent, as governments impose increasingly stringent health restrictions that could reduce foot traffic in shopping centers, discourage travel and thin crowds in restaurants, bars and ski resorts.</p> <p>Austria has imposed the strictest measures, mandating vaccinations and imposing a nationwide lockdown that began on Monday. But economic activity will also be dampened by other safety measures — from vaccine passports in France and Switzerland to a requirement to work from home four days a week in Belgium.</p> <p>The tough lockdowns that swept Europe during the early months of the pandemic last year ended up shrinking economic output by nearly 15 percent. Buoyed by a raft of government support to businesses and the unemployed, most of those countries managed to scramble back and recoup their losses after vaccines were introduced, infection rates tumbled and restrictions eased.</p> <p>In September, economists optimistically declared that Europe had reached a turning point. In recent weeks, the main threats to the economy seemed to stem from a post-lockdown exuberance that was causing supply-chain bottlenecks, energy-price increases and inflation worries. And widespread vaccinations were expected to defang the pandemic's bite so that people could continue to freely gather to shop, dine out and travel.</p> <p>What was not expected was a series of tough government restrictions. A highly contagious strain — aided by some resistance to vaccines and flagging support for other anti-infection measures like masks — has enabled the coronavirus to make a comeback in some regions.</p> <p>Roughly two-thirds of Europe's population has been vaccinated, but rates vary widely from country to country. Only a quarter of the population in Bulgaria has received a shot, for example, compared with 81 percent in Portugal, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Covid cases in children on the rise
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#covid-cases-children

Coronavirus cases in children in the United States have risen by 32 percent from about two weeks ago, a spike that comes as the country rushes to inoculate children ahead of the winter holiday season, pediatricians said.

More than 140,000 children tested positive for the coronavirus between Nov. 11 and Nov. 18, up from 107,000 in the week ending Nov. 4, according to a [statement](#) on Monday from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association.

These cases accounted for about a quarter of the country's caseload for the week, the statement said. Children under 18 make up about 22 percent of the [U.S. population](#).

"Is there cause for concern? Absolutely," Dr. Sean O'Leary, the vice chair of the academy's infectious diseases committee, said in an interview on Monday night. "What's driving the increase in kids is there is an increase in cases overall."

Children have accounted for a greater percentage of overall cases since the vaccines became widely available to adults, said Dr. O'Leary, who is also a professor of pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and Children's Hospital Colorado.

Though children are less likely to develop severe illness from Covid than adults, they are still at risk, and can also spread the virus to adults. Experts have warned that [children should be vaccinated](#) to protect against possible long-Covid symptoms, [Multi-system Inflammatory Syndrome](#) and hospitalization.

At the end of October, about 8,300 American children ages 5 to 11 have been hospitalized with Covid and at least 172 have died, out of more than 3.2 million hospitalizations and 740,000 deaths overall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At a news conference on Friday, Dr. Janet Woodcock, the acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said hospitalizations and deaths among 5- to 11-year-olds were "really startling."

Dr. O'Leary said it did not help that many schools had softened their safety protocols in the last few months.

"So any protection that might be happening in schools is not there," he said.

Vaccinations of younger children are likely to help keep schools open. Virus outbreaks forced about 2,300 schools to close between early August and October, affecting more than 1.2 million students, according to data presented at a C.D.C. meeting on Nov. 2.

Dr. O'Leary said that he was especially concerned about case increases in children during the holiday season.

With the pace of inoculations stagnating among U.S. adults, [states are rushing](#) to encourage vaccinations for children 5 through 11, who became eligible earlier this month after the C.D.C. [authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine](#) for that age group. In May, the federal government recommended [making the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine available to children](#) ages 12 to 15. Teenagers 16 and older became eligible in most states a month earlier.

The White House estimated on Nov. 10 that [nearly a million young children](#) had gotten vaccinated; 28 million are eligible. They receive [one-third of the adult dose](#), with two injections three weeks apart.

All of the data so far indicates that the vaccines are far safer than a bout of Covid, even for children.

Still, about three in 10 parents say they will [definitely not get the vaccine](#) for their [5- to 11-year-old child](#), according a recent poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Only about three in 10 parents said they would immunize their child "right away."

HEADLINE	11/22 Dairy farmers threatened by feed shortages
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/disaster/dairy-farmers-threatened-with-feed-shortages-after-flooding-in-whatcom-skagit-counties/281-276c290f-b0eb-464b-b6bb-abd5460b0f79
GIST	<p>SUMAS, Wash. — Dairy farmers are dealing with feed shortages after last week's catastrophic flooding in Whatcom and Skagit counties.</p> <p>“Everybody on the west side of Washington that feeds animals has been impacted,” said Jeremy Visser, whose farm in Sumas was submerged.</p> <p>He’s now having a difficult time finding certain feed ingredients after rail lines used to deliver grain were damaged.</p> <p>Feed suppliers were also strained by the flooding and are unable to deliver some types of feed, Visser said.</p> <p>The Washington Dairy Federation said more than 100,000 cows are at risk of running short of feed due to the flooding. They said some farms are one to two days from running out of feed, mostly because a key plant in Sumas was flooded.</p> <p>“The EPL feed plant serves dairy farm operations from the Canadian border down past Lewis County. Losing the plant operation affects dairies across all of western Washington,” the federation said in a statement on Monday.</p> <p>On top of that, farmers are dealing with dire financial impacts from the storm. Many of them lost animals, equipment, and even their homes.</p> <p>“If your farm was flooded, you're going to have tremendous long-term impacts,” Visser said.</p> <p>He said he does not expect these issues to cause higher milk prices or shortages at the grocery store, but farmers will certainly feel the impacts for weeks.</p> <p>The Washington Dairy Federation established an assistance fund to help farmers cover costs related to transportation, emergency assistance, cleanup, repairs, supplies, and other needs.</p> <p>Meanwhile, teams from the Emergency Management Division of the Washington State Military Department began inspecting flood-damaged homes and businesses in Whatcom County on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Cleanup: Whatcom Co. floodwaters recede
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/floodwaters-recede-as-whatcom-county-takes-stock-of-devastating-damage-left-behind
GIST	<p>SUMAS, Wash. — Amid large piles of damaged appliances and mounds of debris that have been piled along Cherry Street in Sumas, residents and officials on Monday began to assess the damage from last week's massive flooding.</p> <p>Mayor Kyle Christensen said efforts have begun to not only clean up but to find out how much help residents can expect to receive from the state.</p> <p>“It’s good to get the lights back on (and) we need to support them,” Christensen said. “It’s going to be a big issue.”</p> <p>State officials are working with Whatcom County managers to inspect places like Sumas by surveying damage to homes, businesses and infrastructure as they work to determine the amount of damage and what it might take to get things back to normal.</p>

"Those get into the millions really quick because of the forces of this flood," Christensen said, adding that he doesn't know the threshold it would take for state and federal assistance to get approval but he's positive the city has met it. "I do believe we'll hit that threshold (but) it just takes time to get all that information up there to get it approved. Ultimately they need that help from the government to be able to decide what they can do to their houses."

According to the mayor, many residents in the town did not have flood insurance.

Officials in Whatcom County are assessing the damage left behind after floodwaters receded.

The impact of last week's storm can not only be seen in the mounting piles of debris but in the faces of volunteers who are working to clean up the city.

"Everybody's trying to help everybody," said John Phy, who lives in Whatcom County along with his wife, Lin, who live about 10 miles outside of downtown Sumas and have been picking up debris with their truck. "Looking at the pile. You look through that and that's people's lives."

He said the floods will impact the upcoming holiday season for children.

"There's a lot of kids here and it's going to be a hard holiday for them," Lin said.

To Christensen, every bit helps.

"We'll definitely be seeing this get to that federal level and having it declared as an emergency," Christensen said.

KOMO News reached out to the state emergency management division to ask what the threshold would be to get state and federal assistance but did not immediately get a response.

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HEADLINE	11/22 NHTSA ramps up anti-DUI campaign
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/nhtsa-ramps-up-anti-dui-campaign-ahead-of-busy-holiday-travel
GIST	<p>The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is launching multiple safe driving campaigns in partnership with local law enforcement with hopes to deter impaired driving ahead of one of the busiest travel seasons in America.</p> <p>According to the NHTSA, the days after Thanksgiving are "known for being the deadliest season when it comes to buzzed driving. Every holiday season, lives are lost due to drunk drivers."</p> <p>The NHTSA campaigns that will launch, with help from local law enforcement, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive sober or get pulled over (Dec. 15, 2021 - Jan. 1, 2022)• Drive high, get a DUI (Dec. 15, 2021 - Jan. 1, 2022)• Buzzed driving is drunk driving (Nov. 30, 2021 - Dec. 14, 2021) <p>Millions of people are expected to hit the skies and the roads this year as travel restrictions are lifted and preventative health measures have relaxed.</p> <p>AAA predicts 53.4 million people plan to fly or drive for the Thanksgiving holiday which is up 13% from 2020, according to an AAA news release.</p> <p>"This Thanksgiving, travel will look a lot different than last year," said Paula Twidale, senior vice president, AAA Travel. "Now that the borders are open and new health and safety guidelines are in place, travel is once again high on the list for Americans who are ready to reunite with their loved ones for the holiday."</p>

In December 2019, 837 people lost their lives in traffic crashes involving a drunk driver, data collected by the NHTSA revealed.

A total of 210 drunk-driving-related fatalities were reported between Christmas Eve 2019 and the day after New Year's 2020 alone, which is more than during any other holiday during 2019, according to the NHTSA.

"Approximately one-third of all traffic crash fatalities in the United States involve drunk drivers (with blood alcohol concentrations [BACs] at or above .08 grams per deciliter [g/dL]). In 2019, there were 10,142 people killed in drunk-driving crashes," the NHTSA reported.

Based on NHTSA's 2019 data, one person was killed every 52 minutes in a drunk-driving crash in the United States.

"Always remember to plan ahead if you will be celebrating. If you plan to drink, plan for a sober driver to take you home. Is it your turn to be the designated driver? Take that role seriously and do not consume alcohol, not even one drink," the NHTSA advised.

The agency, along with local law enforcement, will also be enforcing its "Drive high. Get a DUI" campaign which targets drivers who travel under the influence of marijuana or any sort of substance that impairs a person's ability to drive.

"If you're planning to use marijuana or other drugs, do not drive. Designate a driver who won't be using marijuana or other drugs or use public transportation or a ride-sharing service. Someone who's affected by drugs shouldn't be making decisions about driving; that's why planning ahead is key," the NHTSA advised.

Data collected by the NHTSA from 2019 revealed that 46% of drivers who were killed in car crashes tested positive for some sort of drug that impaired their driving ability.

Some local law enforcement have already announced plans to begin ramping up traffic enforcement beginning the day before Thanksgiving.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) will increase enforcement on the roads from Wednesday, Nov. 24, through Sunday, Nov. 28 as a part of the nationwide Operation CARE (Crash Awareness and Reduction Effort) initiative.

Texas DPS participates annually in the nationwide Operation CARE (Crash Awareness and Reduction Effort) initiative for the [Thanksgiving holiday](#), according to a Monday news release.

"This Thanksgiving more people will be out and it's important to remember it's up to each one of us to keep the roads safe," said DPS Director Steven McCraw. "DPS will do its part to keep Texas safe by holding people accountable, and we want everyone who may be driving for the holiday to do their part by obeying all traffic laws, so everyone gets to their destinations unharmed."

The California Highway Patrol will be kicking off its Maximum Enforcement Period (MEP) at 6:01 p.m. local time, beginning on Wednesday, Nov. 24, according to a [CHP news release](#).

"Wherever you choose to celebrate this Thanksgiving, drive safely," CHP Commissioner Amanda Ray said. "When getting behind the wheel, make certain you and all your passengers buckle up before heading out, and remember to always avoid distractions."

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HEADLINE	11/22 BLM: investigate Pierce Co. deputies
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SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/blm-calls-for-investigation-into-pierce-co-use-of-force-against-black-native-american-people
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance (WaBLM) is calling for a civil rights investigation into Pierce County deputies' excessive use of force against people of color.</p> <p>A recent report by the Pierce County Sheriff's Department found their deputies disproportionately use force against Black and Native American people. The report showed Black people are 5.62 times more likely, and Native American/Alaska Native people are 2.31 times more likely, to experience this use of force than white people.</p> <p>Most concerning, the report found Black children experience force between seven and 13 times more often than white children.</p> <p>In light of this, WaBLM lead strategist Sakara Remmu met with U.S. Attorney Nick Brown to discuss launching a civil rights investigation against the agency.</p> <p>"It doesn't get more clear than these numbers; the need for a new vision for justice is overdue at the Pierce County Sheriff's Department," said WaBLM's Carol Mitchell, who formerly served as Senior Counsel for Justice Services in Pierce County.</p> <p>The report suggests that deputies also filed 'limited information' on their justifications for using force when documenting it.</p> <p>With the passing of police reform legislation in 2021, the report recommends a thorough analysis of how the changes will affect the disproportionate use of force, as well as updating statewide standards of data collection to provide better information across counties.</p> <p>"If the DOJ digs further, they will find that Black people are arrested more often and over-represented in the Pierce County Jail and at Remann Hall. When involved in domestic conflict, Black children are not diverted to family therapy, but arrested and sent to detention. Black children are presumed to be gang-affiliated just because of their family name, and get charged with more serious crimes than their white counterparts engaged in the same behavior," said Mitchell. "How can residents have any faith in a department that is brutalizing young Black people? How can residents have trust for a department lead by a Sheriff facing criminal charges for false statements that nearly got an innocent Black man killed? How can residents believe in a department that's being sued by its three highest-ranking Black employees for a history of racial discrimination and harassment?[sic]"</p> <p>"The answer is, they cannot. It's time for the Department of Justice to step in," said Mitchell.</p>
Return to Top	You can read the full use of force report online on the Pierce County Sheriff's Department website .

HEADLINE	11/23 US warship transits Taiwan Strait
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/us-warship-again-transits-sensitive-taiwan-strait-2021-11-23/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Nov 23 (Reuters) - A U.S. warship again sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Tuesday, part of what the U.S. military calls routine activity but which always riles China whose government believes Washington is trying to stir regional tensions.</p> <p>The U.S. Navy said the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer Milius conducted a "routine Taiwan Strait transit" through international waters in accordance with international law.</p> <p>"The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The United States military flies, sails, and operates anywhere international law allows," it added.</p> <p>There was no immediate response from China.</p>

	<p>Last month, the Chinese military condemned the United States and Canada for each sending a warship through the Taiwan Strait, saying they were threatening peace and stability in the region.</p> <p>China claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory, and has mounted repeated air force missions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the past year or so, provoking anger in Taipei.</p> <p>The United States like most countries has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is its most important international backer and arms supplier.</p> <p>Beijing calls Taiwan the most sensitive and important issue in its relations with Washington.</p> <p>U.S. Navy ships have been transiting the strait roughly monthly, to the anger of Beijing. U.S. allies occasionally also send ships through the strait, including Britain in September.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Bus crash in Bulgaria kills 45
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/least-45-people-killed-bus-accident-bulgaria-2021-11-23/
GIST	<p>SOFIA, Nov 23 (Reuters) - At least 45 people, including 12 children, died as a bus carrying mostly North Macedonian tourists crashed in flames on a highway in western Bulgaria hours before daybreak on Tuesday, officials said.</p> <p>Seven people who leapt from the burning bus were rushed to the Pirogov emergency hospital in the Bulgarian capital Sofia and were in a stable condition, hospital staff said. They had suffered burns and one had a broken leg.</p> <p>Bulgaria's interior ministry said 45 people had died, making it the most deadly bus accident in the Balkan country's history.</p> <p>Interim Interior Minister Boyko Rashkov said bodies were "clustered inside and are burnt to ash".</p> <p>"The picture is terrifying, terrifying. I have never seen anything like that before," he told reporters at the site.</p> <p>The cause of the accident was unclear but the bus appeared to have hit a highway barrier either before or after it caught fire, Bulgarian officials said.</p> <p>The accident happened on Struma highway about 30 km (19 miles) west of Sofia around 2 a.m. (0000 GMT), they said.</p> <p>The coach party had been returning to Skopje, capital of North Macedonia, after a weekend holiday trip to Istanbul, a trip of about 800 km (500 miles).</p> <p>'HUGE TRAGEDY'</p> <p>Bulgarian investigative service chief Borislav Sarafov said four buses from a North Macedonian travel agency had entered Bulgaria late on Monday from Turkey.</p> <p>"Human error by the driver or a technical malfunction are the two initial versions for the accident," Sarafov said.</p> <p>Television footage showed the bus standing upright but charred and gutted by fire in the middle of the highway, which was wet from rain.</p>

"This is a huge tragedy," North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev told reporters in Sofia and expressed his condolences to relatives of the victims.

Zaev said the passengers were all from North Macedonia but appeared to include a Serbian citizen and a Belgian citizen. It was unclear whether the two were among the victims or injured.

Zaev said he had spoken to one of the seven survivors who told him the passengers were sleeping when they were woken by the sound of an explosion.

He said people sitting at the back of the bus were able to break a window and jump out.

Zaev said the passengers were from various communities in North Macedonia, a country of 2 million that borders Bulgaria and is home to an ethnic Albanian minority.

In Skopje, ethnic Albanian Osman, 31, told Reuters he had come to the office of the travel agency with his brother and sister seeking information about their parents.

"We do not know if they were on the bus that crashed or not. We have no information about them. The agency is not answering the phone. Perhaps we will need to go to Bulgaria," he said.

Albanian Foreign Minister Olta Xhacka said the passengers were from North Macedonia's ethnic Albanian community.

"Great grief for the 45 lost lives of Albanians from Northern Macedonia during the tragic accident in Bulgaria," he said on Twitter.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Americans burdened by record debt
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/financetalk/consumer-debt-financial-literacy-budgeting/2021/11/22/id/1045681/
GIST	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and the uneven economic recovery have resulted in new reports that Americans are struggling with record amounts of debt, an eye-popping \$15 trillion worth, to be exact.</p> <p>Student loan debt, auto debt and medical debt are all reaching record levels among Americans, tracking with a broader trend of Americans feeling pain in their pocketbooks. While there is some positive news in Americans paying off a record \$83 billion of credit card debt in 2020, the debt crisis continues to affect consumers at record levels.</p> <p>Bad news screams from two recent headlines; CNN's "Americans Have Never Been in so Much Debt," and the New York Post's "Americans Hit a Record-Breaking Amount of Debt". The headlines don't fully put into perspective the massive problem, but delving deeper, the problem is worse than realized.</p> <p>The Federal Reserve of New York has just reported that "between July and September, U.S. household debt reached a new record of \$15.24 trillion", representing an increase of 1.9% compared to the previous quarter.</p> <p>In a statement provided to CNN, Donghoon Lee, a researcher at the Federal Reserve of New York, said, "As pandemic relief efforts wind down, we are beginning to see the reversal of some of the credit card balance trends seen during the pandemic." While a reversion to pre-pandemic spending and debt trends was always to be expected, the New York Fed's report puts into perspective how indebted Americans truly are. Mortgages hit \$10.67 trillion, followed by auto and student loans "rising by \$28 billion and \$14 billion, respectively."</p> <p>The rising debt is a sign that Americans, many of whom are now vaccinated and ready to spend for the holidays, are returning to their pre-pandemic spending habits.</p>

Financial Responsibility Is Key

The total number of debt, \$15.24 trillion, is one that troubles Ellen Lander, founder of [Renaissance Benefit Advisors Group](#). Lander says that the level of debt is “tragic” and that part of the reason it has risen so high is because of the lack of financial literacy taught in schools.

“Why are we not teaching basic financial planning in elementary school? When I look at student debt, a lot of this has to do with a lack of financial literacy being taught,” the financial advisor comments. Lander goes on to say she is “a huge believer in behavioral finance. It is going to take a strategy and a plan to pay off debt. To pay off debt, it is important to remember: Financial responsibility is key.”

The recovery from COVID and inflation in today’s economy are likely key contributors to record levels of debt, as 2021 has been the year when medical debt, auto debt and student loan debt have all soared to new levels. It appears that people are returning to “normal” lives, meaning they are shopping, spending on personal items and scheduling check-ups and routine exams with their doctors.

According to Healthcare.com’s 2021 Medical Debt [Survey](#), more than 30% of all Americans above age 18 are in medical debt, and among this number, an additional 30% say their deductible is too steep and that they cannot afford to pay it off.

In another study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that a lower number, 17.8% of Americans, “had medical debt collections as of June 2020”, and the South is even higher with 24% in medical debt “by far the highest of any region in the country”, author Marshall Terry [states](#). With the holidays approaching, debt is a major concern for millions as well. According to a DebtHammer.org [survey](#), 58% say they expect to take out a short term loan to pay for a holiday gift or celebration. Additionally, 85% of Americans state they “are making changes to their normal shopping routine.”

\$1.37 Trillion in Auto Debt

It’s not just medical debt and loans for shopping. Americans have hit a record high of \$1.37 trillion in outstanding auto debt in 2020, as of an April 2021 [report](#). This is an astronomical increase from 10 years ago, when the overall auto loan debt was \$677 billion. Like auto loan debt, student debt has also hit a record high, with 45 million borrowers who owe a record \$1.7 trillion in student loans, according to [Forbes](#).

All of the debt outstanding in America today is creating worries among consumers. In a sobering statistic, 46% of Americans [expect to retire](#) in debt.

While there is some positive news in Americans [paying off credit card debt in 2020](#), medical debt, auto debt, and student debt have hit astronomical levels. In today’s uncertain economy, it remains to be seen whether outstanding debt will skyrocket further, or if a trend will begin to pay it off.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Florida: lowest case rate per capita
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/florida-covid19-cases/2021/11/22/id/1045763/
GIST	<p>Florida is now reporting the lowest amount of COVID-19 cases per capita in the country.</p> <p>Breitbart reports that as of Monday, the state continued to report the lowest case rate in the U.S., standing at seven per 100,000, with a daily average of COVID-19 cases at 1,437, a decrease of two percent over the last two weeks.</p> <p>However, states run by Democrats that locked down for extended periods of time are struggling with higher case rates than Florida’s. For example, Michigan, led by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer,</p>

	<p>is reporting a daily average of 8,780 daily cases. This translates into 88 cases per capita and a 78 percent increase over the last two weeks. The state's health leaders last week urged everyone 2 years and older to wear a mask, even if they have already been vaccinated.</p> <p>Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul's New York is now reporting a daily average of 6,901 cases, or 35 per capita, representing a 63% increase in the last two weeks.</p> <p>Pennsylvania, led by Democratic Governor Tom Wolf, was locked down for months and is now also seeing a high daily average of 5,903 cases, translating into 46 per 100,000 and a 43% increase over the last two weeks.</p> <p>Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis noted this fact Thursday, at a press conference where he signed legislation combating vaccine mandates, saying that "they don't want to tell you this, but Florida for like almost a month has been either the lowest or one of the lowest COVID in the entire country. You see it surging in other parts. The corporate media, they don't like it when it surges in other parts. They only like it when it surges in places that they don't like."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 EU: illegal border crossings on rise
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/europe-migration-belarus-european-union-mediterranean-sea-9ff5527a07c7cd69124142e4f6f76015
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — The number of people trying to enter Europe without authorization has risen significantly this year to surpass migrant border crossing figures from 2019, before restrictions imposed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited travel, the European Union's border and coast guard said Tuesday.</p> <p>Frontex said in a statement that 160,000 "illegal border crossings" were recorded in the first 10 months of this year, up 70% compared to the same period in 2020 and 45% more than in 2019. The biggest rise was at the EU's eastern borders, in the Balkans region and via central Mediterranean Sea crossings.</p> <p>Almost 8,000 people — most of them Iraqis, Afghans and Syrians — entered through the EU's eastern frontier; a 15-fold increase over 2020, the agency said. Crossings from Belarus hit a peak of more than 3,200 in July, but had dropped to over 600 by October.</p> <p>Frontex said that "while high level frictions between the EU and the Belarusian regime continue," countries neighboring Belarus have "significantly strengthened their border-control measures under exceptional states of emergency," and that this has stopped people moving across in large numbers.</p> <p>The agency said that 48,500 crossings were reported on the "Western Balkans Route" — which many migrants traverse on foot in search of better lives or sanctuary in the relatively-wealthy 27 EU member countries. More than 9,000 entries were recorded in October, an increase of 810% compared to 2019.</p> <p>Arrivals via the central Mediterranean also rose, reaching 6,240 in October, 186% more than in 2019. Frontex said a "significant development" is that a growing number of migrants are crossing by sea into Italy directly from Turkey. Most usually come from Libya and other parts of northern Africa.</p> <p>More Egyptians are arriving through the central Mediterranean from Libya, it said. Separately, migration to the island of Cyprus is also on the rise.</p> <p>The agency said that 16,390 "illegal border crossings" were reported on the western Mediterranean route, often into Spain from northern Africa, but the numbers were 23% less than in 2019.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Vehicles as a weapon of mass killing
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SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/suv-tragedy-wisconsin-shows-vehicles-201755530.html
GIST	<p>Police have yet to confirm what caused a driver to plow a red SUV into a Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, on Nov. 21, 2021, killing at least five people and injuring scores more. But one thing is clear: Vehicles can be a deadly weapon, whether used deliberately or unintentionally.</p> <p>The suspect, identified as Darrell Brooks Jr., is expected to face charges including five counts of intentional homicide. It has emerged that Brooks was previously arrested earlier in November after being accused of hitting the mother of child with his car in a gas station parking lot. Waukesha police confirmed on Nov. 22, that the latest incident, which left 18 children between the ages of 3 and 16 in hospital, was not an act of terrorism. Nor did it follow a police pursuit, although reports suggest that the suspect may have been fleeing an earlier incident.</p> <p>But the manner of the deaths conjures up recent memories of terror attacks using vehicles on perceived soft targets, such as holiday markets, as well as concern over the risk of high-speed chases ending in tragedy.</p> <p>As a scholar who has researched the weaponizing of vehicles, I know that cars, SUVs and trucks can be an efficient means of mass killing, and one that can be virtually impossible to prepare against. Furthermore, it is becoming harder to prosecute the driver involved in such fatalities in some states.</p> <p>‘Poor man’s weapon of mass destruction’</p> <p>Vehicle ramming – defined by the Department of Homeland Security as the deliberate aiming of a motor vehicle at individuals with the intent to inflict fatal injuries or cause significant property damage – has been called the “poor man’s weapon of mass destruction.”</p> <p>Members of the terrorist group Islamic State were not the first to employ this deadly innovation – in attacks on people in London, Nice and New York – but in recent years they have perhaps become most closely associated with the tactic.</p> <p>The group featured “vehicle ramming” in their propaganda as one of their preferred weapons against Western targets and encouraged supporters to use vehicle ramming against crowds. Islamic State group propaganda magazine, Dabiq, even advised would-be lone actors which vehicle could do the most damage. In North America, white supremacists and other militant and terrorist groups have also rammed their vehicles into crowds. Incidents of people running vehicles into pedestrians include that of the violent “incel” – or “involuntary celibate” – Alek Minassian, who rammed his van into a crowd in Toronto in 2018, killing 10. It has also been employed by members of the far-right, such as James Fields, who was found guilty of the murder, by vehicle, of Heather Heyer at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.</p> <p>After the protests following the police killing of George Floyd, there was a massive uptick in the number of attacks, most of which were aimed at Black Lives Matter protests. From the day of Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020, to Sept. 30, 2021, vehicles drove into protests at least 139 times, according to a Boston Globe analysis.</p> <p>During the course of my Department of Defense-sponsored research on how militant and terrorist groups’ use social media, I observed extreme right-wing groups on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Parler and Telegram sharing memes about the vehicular attacks in the summer of 2020. Posts minimized the civilian casualties and mocked the core message of “Black Lives Matter,” turning it into the grotesque slogan “All Lives Splatter” and featuring a white SUV covered in red paint on the hood.</p> <p>And it isn’t only right-wing groups that have targeted protesters. Police in cities such as New York and Detroit have driven vehicles into demonstrations. And in Tacoma, Washington, at least one man was injured after an officer drove into a crowd of protesters. In Boston last year, Police Sergeant Clifton McHale was recorded on a police body camera bragging about hitting protesters with his police cruiser.</p> <p>Criminal and civil immunity</p>

	<p>In recent months, five states – Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Oklahoma and Tennessee – have either shielded drivers who kill pedestrians from legal action or have fully decriminalized hitting a pedestrian with a vehicle if they were in the street or on a highway. Legislatures in states like Iowa, Florida and Oklahoma have passed laws granting drivers criminal and civil immunity if they “unintentionally” hit or kill a protester while “fleeing from a riot,” so long as they say it was necessary to protect themselves. Kansas, Montana, and Alabama are planning similar legislation.</p> <p>Many more Americans are unintentionally killed or injured as a result of high-speed pursuits involving law enforcement. Police chases often occur on public roads or in residential areas. The result of what can be multiple vehicles going at high speeds in these areas can be deadly. The Department of Transportation estimates that around 250,000 high-speed police chases occur every year, with 6,000 to 8,000 of them resulting in a collision.</p> <p>Around 500 people are killed annually as a result of these police pursuits, and approximately 5,000 are injured. The Justice Department, recognizing the danger of high-speed chases, has urged police officers to avoid or abort pursuits that endanger pedestrians, motorists or the officers themselves.</p> <p>The risk to the public of a driver intentionally or unintentionally causing a mass casualty event is, as the Wisconsin case shows, just too high.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Small protests over Rittenhouse acquittal
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2021/11/small-protests-on-capitol-hill-mark-rittenhouse-acquittal-in-seattle/
GIST	<p>A group of people dressed in black bloc marched around Cal Anderson Friday night while a small protest gathered Sunday night at Capitol Hill’s Seattle Central to demonstrate after last week’s acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse on all counts in the 2020 Kenosha shootings.</p> <p>Friday night, a group of a few dozen was reported marching on Broadway and through Pike/Pine. Police reported the scene as “a group size of about 75 people all dressed in black attire with helmets, shields, face coverings and protective eyewear.” SPD says it formed a “task force” with officers from other precincts coming to the area due to the size of the group “and small number of officers.” No significant property damage was reported and SPD said it made no arrests.</p> <p>A smaller protest also formed Sunday night at Seattle Central. While some media reports erroneously confused it with this Seattle Central demonstration, the large march that passed through downtown Seattle Sunday night was a protest against the Biden administration sanction of Eritrea as the Ethiopian civil war continues.</p> <p>A year ago this week, CHS examined the slowing pace of protest in the neighborhood. The limited demonstrations over the weekend continue the pattern in 2021 as large protests and marches have mostly faded away after months of Black Lives Matter and anti-police unrest in the city and Seattle Police declaring multiple riots.</p> <p>The Rittenhouse verdict, meanwhile, raises new questions for a protest related shooting case here on Capitol Hill. Two months before Kenosha, an unarmed man shot as he tried to disarm the brother of an East Precinct officer who drove into a Black Lives Matter demonstration crowd at 11th and Pine in June 2020. Dan Gregory, the man who was shot, is being nominated for the Carnegie Medal, an award presented for acts of extraordinary heroism. Nikolas Fernandez was charged with one count of first degree assault and claimed self-defense as he pleaded not guilty. His trial is currently slated to begin in early February.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 FAA: 8 unruly passengers \$161,823 in fines
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/eight-alcohol-fueled-unruly-passengers-face-161823-in-fines/

GIST	<p>U.S. regulators proposed \$161,823 in fines against eight airline passengers for alleged alcohol-related misbehavior, saying the rate of unruly behavior on flights “remains too high.”</p> <p>The highest penalty announced in a statement Monday was \$40,823 against a traveler who flew Southwest Airlines on April 15 from San Jose to San Diego. The Federal Aviation Administration alleges the person drank their own alcohol during the flight and then sexually assaulted the flight attendant. The traveler was arrested by police at the arrival gate.</p> <p>The FAA is enforcing stricter policies and is working with airports, airlines and unions to rein in a surge of misbehaving passengers this year. This week’s Thanksgiving Holiday is expected to bring the number of travelers close to pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>The other fines ranged from \$34,250 to \$8,250, according to the FAA, which doesn’t have the authority to file criminal prosecutions but is working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department.</p> <p>The FAA this year has received about 300 reports of passenger disturbances due to alcohol and intoxication. Unruly behavior on flights has “dropped sharply,” the regulator said, adding the current rate of 5.6 incidents per 10,000 flights is still too high.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Seattle council fully funds SPD staffing plan
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3248052/after-months-of-fraught-negotiation-seattle-council-fully-funds-spds-staffing-plan/
GIST	<p>Seattle City Council voted 8-1 to approve its 2022 budget, fully funding the police department’s staffing plan in the process.</p> <p>In the end, the council approved SPD for 125 new officers in 2022 and \$26.4 million in officer overtime. Further approval was granted for 26 positions with Community Safety and Communications Center (CSCC), as well as millions of dollars in funding for various triage and community based violence prevention programs.</p> <p>“The Council has made significant investments in community safety in this budget,” Councilmember Lisa Herbold said in a news release. “It is clearer than ever that the unprecedented fear, pain, and isolation of the COVID pandemic are leading to negative mental health impacts for all of us. That’s why our investments in mental health and substance use disorder support are critical to preserve safety in our homes and communities.”</p> <p>A primary point of contention was with the potential for trimming total salaried positions which the department is afforded. Council President Lorena Gonzalez had sponsored a now-failed amendment to the budget which would have curtailed those positions by 101.</p> <p>That aspect of the budget deliberation was a point of confusion and tension between SPD and the council, after interim Chief Adrian Diaz wrote in a statement last week that the council would “vote on whether to eliminate 101 police officer positions.” Gonzalez later criticized the statement as a mischaracterization of the situation, given that the legislation would have removed positions which have already been vacated, and would not have affected SPD’s staffing plan for 2022.</p> <p>SPD reported earlier this year that it had accrued some \$15 million in unspent payroll due to staff attrition. Abrogating those 101 positions would have preemptively avoided a similar situation in the future, with the council and mayor’s office clashing over how to use the unspent resources.</p> <p>Another item related to police funding up for discussion was how to modify, accept, or reject Mayor Durkan’s order to ramp up SPD hiring bonuses.</p>

	<p>A number of competing amendments were on the table, with Councilmember Sawant looking to completely reject the order (with regard to funding SPD, not 911 dispatch), and other more moderate wings of the council looking to scale back the order while meeting immediate staffing requirements.</p> <p>Ultimately, the council elected to approve Councilmember Herbold's amendment which recognized the short term success of the emergency order, with Herbold stating in sessions Nov. 19 that the dispatch has seen "an increase in new hires" as causative result of the new hiring bonuses.</p> <p>However, her amendment will end the order as Durkan leaves office, signaling that the council wishes to establish a working relationship with Mayor-elect Harrell before making long-term decisions with regard to hiring bonuses to meet the needs of a department which repeatedly reports staffing shortages.</p> <p>That amendment was approved by the slimmest of margins, four to three, with two voting in abstention. With its passage in budget committee, the council avoided a vote on Councilmember Sawant's more firm declaration of opposition to the amendment.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 King Co. to skip annual homeless count
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3247933/king-county-to-skip-homeless-point-in-time-count-2022/
GIST	<p>Breaking with what had been a yearly routine prior to the pandemic, King County will opt not to conduct its "point in time" count of homeless residents in 2022.</p> <p>The county is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to perform a count of those who living unsheltered in odd-numbered years. HUD then uses that data to allocate federal funding. Up until this last year, King County had opted to exceed that mandate and do the count annually.</p> <p>King County did not have to do a point-in-time count in 2021 after being granted a waiver due to the ongoing pandemic.</p> <p>For years, the methodology for the point-in-time count has faced criticism for not providing accurate data, given that it relies on volunteers to hand-count the number of people they observe living unsheltered on a single night, and then calculate a rough estimate of people they believe they might have missed living in abandoned buildings. That was one of the driving factors behind the King County Regional Homeless Authority's (RHA) decision to skip the count in 2022.</p> <p>"Because of the methodology, the PIT is widely understood to be an undercount, which can be harmful in skewing the narrative and limiting the budget and resources dedicated to solutions," the RHA described in a recently-published FAQ. "... Because it relies on what volunteers see during a few hours in the early morning, in a neighborhood that may be unfamiliar to them, recorded on a paper tally sheet, at a time when there could be heavy rain or cold, there are many ways for data to be missed."</p> <p>Instead of doing the count in 2022, the RHA plans to "conduct qualitative engagement with people living unsheltered to learn more about their experiences and how we can better meet their needs." It will then perform the count as mandated by HUD in 2023, with plans to "take a critical look" at data-gathering processes in the interim period to develop a "more illustrative snapshot of homelessness in our region."</p> <p>The last count performed in King County took place on Jan. 24, 2020, identifying just over 11,700 individuals experiencing homelessness. The largest numbers by far were recorded in Seattle, where 8,166 homeless individuals were counted. The next highest total (1,937) was identified in Southwest King County.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 WSF hit early snags in full return to service
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3247849/washington-state-ferries-early-snags-return-normal-service/

GIST	<p>Washington State Ferries was set to start the return to full fall service last Friday. That plan hit an early snag on Monday, with multiple sailings canceled over crew shortages.</p> <p>That included the cancellation of all Monday evening's sailings for one of the boats serving the San Juan Islands. A roundtrip sailing between Seattle and Bremerton for this afternoon was canceled for the same reason, with service scheduled to resume at 2:50 p.m.</p> <p>Staffing shortages have meant unexpected cuts on nearly all runs for more than a month. As it gradually returns to fall service, WSF has been operating on a reduced schedule on most routes to help cut down on cancellations.</p> <p>"These changes will help offer more predictable and reliable service systemwide in the face of crewing shortages due to a global shortage of mariners that has been worsened by the pandemic," it said in a Sunday update. "WSF will attempt to add service when possible, and will provide notifications when full service can temporarily be restored to a route."</p> <p>Meanwhile, there will be no accepted new reservations for San Juan Islands sailings "until further notice." Existing reservations will be honored on a first-come/first-serve basis ahead of vehicles without reservations. WSF advises those traveling on standby to "get to the terminal early," and to expect delays.</p> <p>The ferry service says it is working to add more sailings for the holiday weekend.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Measuring toll of broken child care system
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2021/11/measuring-toll-broken-child-care-system
GIST	<p>It's hard to get an economy moving again when almost half of your potential workers can't leave the house.</p> <p>That's basically what it means when unemployed and underemployed people can't take jobs because they care for their kids at home — either because there is no child care available or because the child care costs nearly as much as or more than what the job would bring in.</p> <p>In Washington state, about half of unemployed women and about 40% of unemployed men told survey takers that in the year before April 2020, child care issues were a barrier to even seeking work. And that was largely the situation before the pandemic, during which many child care centers had to shut their doors or reduce the number of children they could handle.</p> <p>Maya Ewings is the busy mom of two active boys, the younger almost a year old, and his brother barely 3. At 30, Ewings has a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, which includes sociology, psychology and family studies. Her life calls on all those disciplines — but not in a full-time job in her field.</p> <p>She attends a few births per month as a doula, facilitates a support group for moms of color and braids hair. She also volunteers as a mentor for girls and as a parent ambassador to advocate for early learning with the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program). She does all of this without any professional child care, while her husband works full-time in a group home for foster teens and tries to build a photography business on the side.</p> <p>Ewings, her husband and kids live with her recently retired mother, in her mom's townhome in the Manitou neighborhood of south Tacoma. The neighborhood feels safe and relatively quiet, with a mix of families and retired folks. But the 1,100-square-foot house is small for five people: Maya, her husband and the toddler share one bedroom, while her mom shares the other with the baby. When Maya needs to focus on paid work, her mom, in her 70s, cares for the boys — help that is essential, as it is for many Washington families, but far from perfect. With both boys now walking and running, it's more of a challenge than ever.</p>

When her first son was a baby, Ewings had two jobs, as a full-time family support specialist with an ECEAP program and as a part-time teacher in a child care center in Tacoma. She and her husband earned too much to qualify for child care subsidies but not enough to be able to pay full price; she worked the child care job to get a discount for the baby.

But she felt as though she was working to pay for child care, spending little time with her son, and still not getting ahead. So, she quit her two jobs and started caring for her son and the kids of two friends, who needed more affordable child care at irregular hours.

A few years and another son later, Ewings would like to find a more stable job — in nonprofit management, for example — but she has done the math. It would bump them up above eligibility for child care subsidies and other safety-net programs. She would still be working to pay for child care. And she would have the stress of juggling the job, family time and the need to find good, affordable child care nearby.

“It feels impossible,” she said.

Ewings wants to make more money and be able to start the master’s program in marriage and family counseling into which she was accepted. But, she said, “The way things are, it’s not set up for an average person’s success. I could be doing more; I could achieve my dreams.”

The lack of access to affordable, quality child care causes a bottleneck in achieving Ewings’ dreams and securing her family’s future, and it’s the same for the Washington state economy and broader society. Parents keep switching lanes and looking for new routes. The gridlock sidelines potential workers and frustrates employers. Around the state, people doing innovative work to resolve the crisis say a solution will require more attention and funding — help that can’t come soon enough.

Improving child care so parents can work

Just two counties west of Pierce County, where the Ewings family lives, rural Grays Harbor County is home to an active port, with four deep-water terminals and the top-ranking seafood landing port in the state. The county also has a strong tourism industry driven by beach communities, such as Ocean Shores and the Quinault Beach Resort & Casino. Retail and service jobs now far surpass those in timber and wood-product manufacturing, which once dominated the local economy.

But as Josh Martin, CEO of Summit Pacific Medical Center in Elma, pointed out, Grays Harbor is also one of the least healthy counties in the state. One in five children lives in poverty, one of the highest rates in Washington. The county fares poorly on income and other health indicators.

Like many counties in Washington, it has serious problems with affordable child care for parents who want to find paid work.

In a recent survey of Grays Harbor parents, almost 60% said child care prices are unaffordable for their families. “I no longer qualify for subsidized child care. As a result, I cannot afford to send my children to day care,” one parent told survey takers from a regional task force, “and it’s far too costly to do drop-in care.”

Amy Anderson, government affairs director at the Association of Washington Business, said she hears from more and more employers that the lack of child care is contributing to severe workforce shortages, particularly in Grays Harbor.

In the past three years, the number of licensed child care slots there dropped from 1,289 to 995, according to Child Care Aware of Washington, a nonprofit child care resource and referral agency.

Lynnette Buffington, CEO of the chamber of commerce and economic development council of Grays Harbor, never expected that child care would be one of her focuses when she took the job in 2020. But she says it has to be, given how access to child care affects the local economy.

In that same task force project, done in Grays Harbor and two adjacent counties, almost all employers reported that child care was a problem for their workers. More than half of them ranked the availability of child care as “poor” or “very poor.” And more than half of employed Grays Harbor parents said they rely on networks of families and friends to take care of kids, an essential but often unpredictable arrangement.

Buffington said the issues need emergency attention and triage. Employers tell her that their workers “deny themselves economic and professional growth” because the changes in work schedules resulting from a promotion could disrupt whatever fragile care arrangements they’ve made. A promotion can also mean just enough of a pay increase to make a family ineligible for certain public safety-net programs, including child care.

Child care also becomes a problem for recruiters, she said. And a workable child care system entails more than 9-to-5 weekday care for young children. After-school care, late-night and weekend care, and care arrangements during holidays and summer breaks all must be figured in. One Grays Harbor survey respondent wrote that in their family, the inability to find a way to get kids from school to after-school care was a primary barrier in keeping the parents from working full-time.

Statewide, about 1 in 4 families need care outside of traditional hours. Service jobs that put a premium on employees who can work evenings, weekends and on short notice are a real barrier to child care. In Washington, the problem is more acute among low-income parents of young children; more than half of them work some nonstandard hours.

But delivering care during those hours is a challenge for child care providers with tiny profit margins. It’s another painful way in which the child care economic system isn’t working.

Employers search for ways to help

The medical center in Elma and a state prison in Aberdeen, two of the largest employers in Grays Harbor County, are particularly hard hit by inadequate child care services, because so many of their staff members must do their work in person, rather than remotely.

At Aberdeen’s Stafford Creek Corrections Center, human resources consultant Rhonda Schwerdel said the high costs and low availability of child care have hurt recruitment and retention at the 500-employee facility.

This is especially true for “custody” staff. Guards and workers with similar responsibilities can’t take advantage of flexible work schedules or teleworking. Nor can they bring their babies to work. Custody jobs run on three shifts, 24 hours, every day, so those workers need child care at all hours of the day, on weekends and holidays. Schwerdel said couples who both work at the prison will choose not to work the same shift in order to get around the lack of available child care. And many Stafford Creek workers, including Schwerdel, rely on family, friends and neighbors to fill in gaps in care.

The prison must keep a certain number of custody staff on each shift to provide security and supervision. If a staff shortage develops at any point, managers call on employees to work mandatory overtime, a process governed by a collective bargaining agreement.

Not surprisingly, that wreaks havoc on carefully cobbled-together child care plans. And it can take physical and mental tolls on staff already working in a stressful environment.

Summit Pacific Medical Center’s Martin sees child care as an economic driver. The hospital plans to expand its services, and thus its staff, by at least 30% in the coming years, he said, making it critically important to increase child care capacity in the county.

The hospital already provides a flexible spending account for child care, and administrators work with staff whenever possible to restructure shifts or allow remote options. But that's feasible for only a small number of its 375 employees.

"Summit Pacific has lost employees due to a lack of child care and has even had candidates turn down job offers" for the same reason, Martin said.

The challenge for hospitals is especially acute in rural communities. Like child care centers, hospitals have patient-to-staff ratios to ensure safety and quality care. When there are not enough staff or beds to care for patients, the hospitals go on "divert" status, sending ambulances elsewhere. That means patients who need critical care must wait longer and end up farther from loved ones. It also means that, for the length of the ride to and from a more distant hospital, an ambulance is unavailable to answer calls back in Elma.

Martin said an employee survey conducted several years ago demonstrated the need for child care closer to Elma. So the hospital lobbied and collaborated with local partners to bring in a new child care business across the street, with capacity for about 120 kids on a full-time basis. With land and site preparation donated by a church, a grant from the state and a private loan, Learning to Grow hopes to open the site in the fall of 2022.

Employers have a range of tools to help workers with child care needs, from flexible scheduling to spending accounts that allow employees to set aside pretax dollars for child care. Flexible scheduling is one of the easiest solutions for some worksites and some jobs. In fact, nearly half of the surveyed employers in Grays Harbor and nearby counties do this.

Company and state policies on paid leave can help, especially with newborns. Schwerdel said 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave has been a big help to the prison staff. She sees families with the new mom taking 12 weeks first, then the dad taking 12 weeks. That gets them through nearly the first six months of a new baby's life, with time to both bond and establish a child care routine.

Companies as diverse as local fast-food chain Dick's Drive-In and Facebook offer employees financial assistance to directly pay for child care. But parents cannot pay for something that doesn't exist.

The widening circle of effects

This high price of child care, for many families, comes when their income is at its lowest. The resulting years long financial bind leads to a need for other public safety-net support. And the impacts of not being able to provide good care roll on through years, generations and communities.

Ewings and her two kids rely, somewhat reluctantly, on insurance through Apple Health (Medicaid) and support from food stamps. Her husband has health insurance through Veterans Affairs. For a brief period, the Ewings' older son was enrolled in Early Head Start (federally provided developmental care), until that program closed by COVID-19.

But when asked what is the one thing that would help her most, Ewings said affordable housing. Even if she were doing full-time paid work, the family still wouldn't be able to move out of her mom's house. Rent and the price of infant care are about the same, said Ewings. "So, you are choosing between a roof over your head and having your children somewhere so you can work."

When parents can't afford quality care, kids miss out on the skills that prepare them to do well in school. Just 52% of Washington kids enter kindergarten meeting readiness scores in all six domains of development: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy and mathematics. In the Aberdeen School District, that figure is 37.5%, and in Elma, it is 40%. Across the state, significantly lower shares of students from low-income families and from Native American, Black, Latino and Pacific Islander families are ready for kindergarten.

High-quality preschool, with trained early childhood educators, prepares kids for success in school and helps narrow racial, ethnic and income disparities. Kids who had access to quality preschool have a better chance of graduating from high school and going to college. The research overwhelmingly suggests that investing early pays off later.

Finding and funding solutions

The Washington State Department of Commerce has funded many collaborative child care assessment and planning projects around the state in recent years. These projects, such as the child care task force in Grays Harbor, Mason and Thurston counties, assess the unique challenges in their regions.

Community leaders in those counties got together with parents, employers and providers to develop a long list of action strategies. For example, counties could find ways to provide technical support to start child care businesses and help existing ones expand. Counties could also provide incentives to convert commercial space into child care facilities.

Gary Burris, executive director of the Child Care Action Council in Olympia and a leader of the tricity task force, thinks that the most important strategies for addressing the child care crisis are also “the hardest and the most expensive” — increasing compensation for workers and expanding access for child care subsidies.

The government must play a role here, he said. Burris estimated that the state funds about 25% to 30% of higher-education expenses at state universities. If the state could do the same with child care providers’ expenses, it would reduce the price for parents and subsidize pay for the workforce. “We’d be on the way to having a stable child care industry that could better meet the needs of families, workers and businesses,” he said.

The Association of Washington Business’ Anderson said part of the long-term solution must be an analysis of the actual costs of quality child care, including decent wages and benefits for child care workers. The state is preparing to do that now.

From there, she said, “we have to figure out how to pay for child care as a public good.”

Back in Grays Harbor, Buffington is thinking about ways to support child care providers as the entrepreneurs that they are. Including them in small-business development conversations and networks, for instance, could open funding opportunities and pathways to expansion to dedicated providers that don’t have much business training.

Buffington and others also think the state could reduce the regulatory burden on child care businesses without compromising quality. She said everyone associated with child care knows the business model isn’t working, and yet there seems to be a collective shrug about it.

John Burbank, the recently retired executive director of the Economic Opportunity Institute, a Washington nonprofit public policy center, suggested one reason for that attitude. “When moms are at home raising children, it has no monetary value, it’s not part of GDP [gross domestic product]. That sense of valuelessness follows a child, moving from a home into the child care market,” he said. “Then you have the historical, cultural and current reality of patriarchy, and the diminution of women’s work, and racial bias.”

Stephanie Smith, owner of the Learning to Grow child care center in Grays Harbor County, said she is happy that the state is beginning to view child care as an investment.

“This is too big and too important of an investment for families and providers to carry by themselves,” she said.

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SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjb8z5/people-in-minneapolis-are-calling-each-other-instead-of-the-cops
GIST	<p>For nearly two decades, Jason Sole had used his time and energy as a local organizer fighting against racist policing in the city of St. Paul, Minn. But even after a brief stint working within Mayor Melvin Carter's office, he says, his community continued to suffer under an all-too-familiar status quo.</p> <p>Last year, as buildings burned around him during demonstrations against the police murder of George Floyd, Sole found himself out on the streets, answering calls from community members who needed support during the uprising.</p> <p>"It was madness," he told Motherboard. Within days, Sole's trusted friend and organizer Signe Harri day prompted the formation of a small group of longtime local organizers to streamline communications and facilitate mutual aid during the uprising. "We were just saying, let's start figuring out how we love and support the community no matter what's going on," he said. "And that was the start of it."</p> <p>What emerged from the chaotic uprising was an initiative called Relationships Evolving Possibilities (REP), an abolitionist, Black liberatory project that organizes communities to resolve conflicts and help each other—and hopes to make police intervention obsolete and unnecessary.</p> <p>Instead of relying on coercive violence from police and prisons, REP advocates a vision of public safety where communities solve their own problems by showing up for each other, using the skills and resources they truly need.</p> <p>To put this into practice, REP helps organize people into what they call "pods"—groups of residents typically already loosely in community with each other. Through ongoing trainings, REP teaches pods how to de-escalate situations, provide peer-to-peer mental health support, and practice other forms of transformative justice. If people in a particular housing complex go through conflict resolution training, for example, they could more easily address a noise complaint by communicating with each other face-to-face, rather than calling the police.</p> <p>The pods establish connections across a diverse range of communities with different experiences. Sole, who is formerly incarcerated and currently a professor, is in pods with students and incarcerated people. Another core member, Roxanne Anderson is linked up with musicians and LGBTQ communities, while Harri day organizes with BIPOC LGBTQ+ artists, activists and healers to support community with respite and retreat on a farm.</p> <p>Not every crisis or problem can be addressed within the pod network, however. In June 2021, REP rolled out a hotline called Revolutionary Emergency Partners that responds to "non-violent" emergency calls on Friday and Saturday evenings from 7 PM to midnight. Thanks to funding from grants and donations, the group can train volunteers to handle things like noise complaints, mental health crises, and neighbor disputes, and to refer people to other community services. Eventually, REP hopes to respond to calls dealing with domestic abuse, medical crises and anything involving active violence.</p> <p>Despite popular claims to the contrary, such cases only comprise a tiny portion of the calls police respond to. According to a 2019 study, police officers currently spend only about four percent of their time addressing violent crime.</p> <p>Abolitionist groups like REP have criticized police departments for amassing enormous power and resources while doing nothing to prevent harm in their communities—or address its root causes. "REP doesn't profess or claim to be the solution to all the harm and trauma facing and circulating in the community," Harri day told Motherboard. "We lean on abolitionists past and present, who also didn't have a perfect next step plan but who nonetheless fought like hell for us."</p> <p>Unlike other anti-violence groups, REP's work notably avoids any collaboration with police or government agencies on principle. This is in contrast with various "violence intervention" groups that have increasingly cropped up since the George Floyd uprisings, some of which have received funding from the Department of Justice and numerous city governments.</p>

Many of these groups are [non-profits](#) who claim to approach violence as a public health issue, with a treatment that involves training outreach teams composed of people who are well-respected or trusted within a particular community. The teams are instructed to identify and provide support for individuals and groups deemed at high risk of violence and provide rapid response at the scene of an incident to de-escalate conflict.

But one primary objective of such programs, [according to a memo from the Department of Justice](#), is to encourage close collaboration between these community-based organizations and police. In the Twin Cities, [previous reports](#) have shown that the Minneapolis Police Department and some non-profit intervention groups are in frequent contact.

There is also disagreement among these groups on what qualifies as violence in the first place. During last year's uprisings, many state-funded violence interrupter groups did not attempt to stop police from using tear gas or performing violent arrests, but were [criticized](#) for attempting to pacify and influence demonstrators in [New York](#), [Minneapolis](#), [Brooklyn Center](#), and many other major cities.

Cities are also increasingly promoting [collaborations between police and mental health and social workers](#) by embedding them within police departments. Critics of the model, including the Chicago chapter of [Social Service Workers United](#), say social workers should not be aligned with systems and structures of power that criminalize and punish individuals for systemic problems, and argue social and mental health workers cannot simply replace police either.

"If all we do is replace police with social workers without eliminating these carceral aspects of social work, last year we will simply subject vulnerable people to cops by a different name," the union [wrote last year in an open letter](#). "This moment requires profound institutional reckoning."

REP's core members are similarly wary of such reforms. In 2013, Sole helped form the Minneapolis community ambassador initiative, a group that formed relationships with youth to reduce harm on the city's streets. He said it functioned so well that the state of Minnesota wanted to give them funding, but that's when the problems started. The city ended up "co-opting" the program to reproduce government functions, and encouraging the group's members to go on ride-alongs with the police, he said.

Now, REP recognizes the value in remaining independent, taking inspiration and guidance from other abolitionist groups like the [Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective](#), [CAT911](#), and [MHFirst Oakland](#). "We don't want to be a nonprofit," Sole said bluntly. "We're gonna be able to say whatever we want to say, we're not gonna have that nonprofit jacket on us to where we can move how we want to move."

REP isn't the only alternative vision of public safety to come out of Minneapolis since last year. A recent ballot initiative proposed replacing the Minneapolis Police Department with a Department of Public Safety and eliminating the department's minimum funding and staffing requirement. But on Election Day, the ballot measure was narrowly struck down in a [56 to 44 percent vote](#), with around 60,000 city residents voting in favor of the proposal.

REP hopes and expects that the electoral setback will inspire more people to try their do-it-yourself approach to community safety.

"I think because of how that amendment all went down, you're going to see more groups showing up in a REP kind of way," said Sole. "People are gonna start figuring out their own safety mechanisms. After a while, you're gonna look at police call logs and say, 'Man, a lot of y'all calls get diverted to groups like REP and other groups that are going to form.'"

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HEADLINE	11/22 Overall Seattle police budget shrinks \$8M
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-budget-shrinks-after-city-councils-final-approval

GIST

SEATTLE — The Seattle Police Department's budget shrunk after a final vote from the City Council.

Funding for SPD has been one of the most contentious issues in the city budget.

In an 8-1 vote, the council approved a \$355.5 million budget for SPD saying there are no cuts functionally for SPD.

The budget includes funds to hire 125 officers in 2022.

But the police department's budget is shrinking compared to years past—especially with a mass exodus of officers during the “Defund SPD” movement.

In 2021 budget was \$363 million and in 2020 is was \$401.8 million.

Earlier this fall, Mayor Jenny Durkan's proposed budget had an additional \$10 million from SPD salary savings for things like hiring bonuses.

But that was cut.

KOMO News talked to her one-on-one about the budget before the vote last week.

“Now is not the time to both be cutting officers also but every time council acts, they're telling officers that are here today if they're valued or not,” said Mayor Durkan. “Mayor-elect Harrell ran on adding more officers and I'm trying to set him up for success as much as I can.”

The budget includes funds for 1357 officers and SPD says right now, there are 1,120 officers on the force—which leaves 237 open jobs.

City Council's budget did add six Community Safety Officer positions to SPD, making the team size 24 in 2022.

The Downtown Seattle Association criticized council's budget for missing the mark saying: “Seattle voters sent a clear message earlier this month that they want city government to prioritize addressing homelessness and improving public safety. Unfortunately, the City Council's 2022 budget misses the mark on both fronts. Despite being the largest budget in city history, it is incomplete with no clear strategy to meaningfully address these issues and support the recovery of downtown Seattle. The budget shortchanges the investments recommended by the Regional Homelessness Authority in a downtown homelessness plan and the council's opposition to the Mayor's proposed SPD budget sends the wrong signal to officers and our community. Seattle voters and the downtown community want to see action and results on these critical issues to support the continued recovery and renewal of our center city, and we look forward to working with our newly elected Mayor, City Council member and City Attorney to make this a reality in 2022.” – Downtown Seattle Association.

But groups like Decriminalize Seattle praised the budget reduction, saying its time to invest in communities. Angélica Cházaro from Decriminalize Seattle said: “I want to live in a city equipped to address the current and coming crises without resorting to armed cops to protect the rich at the expense of the poor. This is why we demanded a Solidarity Budget, and why we celebrate every penny that leaves harmful policing practices and goes towards building a Seattle where we can all survive and thrive. We now urge Mayor Durkan to sign this budget into law. Our cross-movement coalition helped us secure a defund of SPD two-years in a row, and we'll be back for more.”

The budget heads to the Mayor's desk, so she it sign it into law.

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HEADLINE

11/22 Police union: SEA staff shortage concern

SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/travel/police-shortage-caused-by-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-putting-sea-tac-airport-visitors-at-risk-union-says/281-fd1bead2-343e-4204-8e59-074cb7c4f1ae
GIST	<p>SEATAC, Wash. — The union representing Port of Seattle police told port officials they have "extreme concern" over the safety of the people they represent and the public traveling through Seattle-Tacoma International Airport due to a staffing shortage.</p> <p>Port officials, however, disagree and say they are confident in both police and TSA staffing levels.</p> <p>In a letter to Port of Seattle Executive Director Stephen Metruck, Teamsters Local Union 117 wrote the COVID-19 vaccine mandate is putting "your employees and the public at great risk during the holidays." The union points to the port's refusal to allow 17 police department employees who haven't been fully vaccinated to return to work.</p> <p>Those employees - 14 officers, sergeants, commanders and three traffic specialists - have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the union. However, they are not fully vaccinated.</p> <p>The decision to prohibit them from working until they are fully vaccinated "is completely contrary to your stated goal of ensuring the health and safety of your employees and the public," the union writes.</p> <p>According to the union, the number of port police employees who are fully vaccinated is "insufficient to meet safe staffing levels" for the volume of people expected to travel over the Thanksgiving holiday. They will "likely be forced" to work 80 hours or more per week, according to the union.</p> <p>On top of the employees not fully vaccinated, the union said port police were already short 17 officers and "nearly" 10 traffic specialists.</p> <p>On Monday, Port of Seattle spokesperson Perry Cooper said they are comfortable with their current staffing levels. He said plans have been in place, knowing the vaccine mandate deadline was coming.</p> <p>"We are able to continue to maintain safety for all our passengers," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Fake news fueled border crisis in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/world/europe/belarus-migrants-facebook-fake-news.html
GIST	<p>BRUZGI, Belarus — After more than a week sleeping in a frigid encampment on the border between Belarus and Poland, and an abortive foray across the frontier repelled by pepper spray and police batons, Mohammad Faraj gave up this month and retreated to a warm hotel in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.</p> <p>Soon after, however, he watched with surprise and excitement a video report on Facebook claiming that Poland was about to open its border and urging all those who wanted to enter the European Union to gather at a gas station near the encampment that the migrants had nicknamed "the jungle."</p> <p>Mr. Faraj, a 35-year-old ethnic Kurd from Iraq, rushed back to the squalid camp he had just left, traveling 190 miles from Minsk to the gas station just in time for the opening of the border in early November that he had heard about on Facebook.</p> <p>The Polish border, of course, remained tightly shut and Mr. Faraj spent the next 10 days back in what he described as "like something out of a horror movie."</p> <p>The European Union, offering robust support to Poland's hard-line stand against migrants, has blamed the traumas of recent weeks on its eastern border on the authoritarian leader of Belarus, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko.</p> <p>The Belarusian authorities certainly have helped stoke the crisis, offering easy tourist visas to thousands of Iraqis and easing their way to the border with Poland.</p>

But social media, particularly Facebook, also have given Mr. Lukashenko a vital assist, as an unpredictable accelerant to the hopes and illusions of people who have fallen prey to the empty promises of profiteers and charlatans on the internet.

Some were in it for money, promising to smuggle migrants across borders for hefty fees; some appeared to bask in the attention they received as online “influencers” for sharing information; others seemed motivated by a genuine desire to help people suffering. There has been no evidence to suggest a coordinated campaign by Mr. Lukashenko to target migrants with fake information online.

Fake news on Facebook, said Mr. Faraj, who last week was moved from the border encampment along with 2,000 other denizens of “the jungle,” to a giant nearby warehouse converted into a migrant holding center, “poured mud on our heads and destroyed our lives.”

Since July, activity on Facebook in Arabic and Kurdish related to migration to the E.U. through Belarus has been “skyrocketing,” said Monika Richter, head of research and analysis for Semantic Visions, an intelligence firm that tracked social media activity related to the crisis.

“Facebook exacerbated this humanitarian crisis and now you have all these people who were brought over and explicitly misled and ripped off,” said Ms. Richter.

Researchers said smugglers openly shared their phone numbers and advertised their services on Facebook, including video testimonials from people said to have reached Germany successfully via Belarus and Poland. In one post, a smuggler advertised “daily trips from Minsk to Germany with only a 20 km walking distance.” The journey, a writer warned in another post on Oct. 19, is “not suitable for children due to the cold.” Another smuggler with the Facebook user name “Visa Visa” pitched trips to Germany from Belarus through Poland. The smuggler said the trip would take 8 to 15 hours but added a warning: “Don’t call if you are afraid.”

Last Friday, despite the bitter experience of so many promises on Facebook that turned out to be false, a ripple of excitement swept across despondent people huddled in the warehouse after reports on social media that it was still possible to get into Europe — for anyone willing to pay \$7,000 to a guide who claimed to know an easy route across the Belarus-Poland frontier and through massed ranks of Polish soldiers and border guards on the other side.

Rekar Hamid, a former math teacher in Iraqi Kurdistan who had already paid around \$10,000 to travel agents in Iraq for a “package tour” that was supposed to get himself, his wife and young child to Europe but only got them locked up in a warehouse, scoffed at the latest offer as yet another scam. “They keep saying the door is opening but look where we all are now,” he said, gesturing toward a mass of people huddled on the concrete floor.

Musa Hama, another Kurd from Iraq confined to the warehouse, lamented that no amount of fact-checking would prevent people grasping at straws of hope provided by Facebook. “People are desperate so they believe anything,” he said.

The stampede by migrants to Belarus in the hope of getting into the European Union began earlier this year when the authoritarian former Soviet republic relaxed tightfisted visa policies for certain countries, notably Iraq. The relaxation was ostensibly an effort to boost tourism at a time when most Westerners were staying away following a brutal crackdown by Mr. Lukashenko in response a contested presidential election.

Sensing a lucrative business opportunity, travel companies in Iraq’s semiautonomous Kurdistan Region started advertising on Facebook and other platforms about the availability of visas to Belarus. Smugglers used social media to pitch Belarus as an easy back door to Europe.

Since July, Semantic Visions has identified dozens of Facebook groups created to share information about migration routes and used by smugglers to advertise their services. A private group titled “Migration of the powerful from Belarus to Europe” exploded from 13,600 members in early September to roughly 30,000 currently, according to Semantic Visions. Another group, “Belarus Online,” grew from 7,700 members to 23,700 during the same period. On Telegram, a messaging and chat room platform, channels devoted to Belarus as a route to Europe have also attracted thousands of members.

“Our findings reveal the extent to which social media platforms — particularly Facebook — have been used as a de facto market for smuggling into the European Union,” Semantic Visions concluded in a recent report that has been circulated among European Union officials.

Facebook, now officially known as Meta after a corporate name change, said it prohibited material that facilitates or promotes human smuggling and has dedicated teams to monitor and detect material related to the crisis. It added that the company was working with law enforcement agencies and nongovernmental organizations to counter the flood of fake news relating to migration.

“People smuggling across international borders is illegal and ads, posts, pages or groups that provide, facilitate or coordinate this activity are not allowed on Facebook,” the company said in an emailed statement. “We remove this content as soon as we become aware of it.”

But the events in Belarus have exposed how, even after Facebook experienced a similar abuse of its services during the European migration crisis in 2015, the company still struggles to keep banned material off its platform, especially in non-English languages.

“Facebook is not taking their responsibility seriously and as a direct consequence of that we see desperate people in the cold, in the mud, in the forest in Belarus, in a desperate situation, all because they believe the misinformation that was provided to them through Facebook,” said Jeroen Lenaers, a member of the European Parliament from the Netherlands who is a leader on the legislature’s committee that handles migration issues.

It is unclear what, if any, steps Facebook has taken to deal with misleading and potentially dangerous information.

One Kurdish-German influencer widely known online as Karwan Rawanduzy is a popular figure among would-be migrants to Europe, but his online videos and other reports frequently promote bogus stories, like the claim that Poland would open its border in early November.

Mr. Rawanduzy’s live posts on a Facebook page named Kurdisch News had more than 100,000 followers before it was disabled in November after the Kurdish-German influencer said a Polish politician had publicly accused him of helping to fuel the crisis. The page also featured videos sent by hungry and cold migrants trapped along the border.

Reached by phone in Hamburg, Germany, Mr. Rawanduzy said he was repeating information about pressure on Poland to open the border that he said had been reported by German media. He blamed smugglers and countries including Poland for the misery faced by migrants and that he was simply trying to help the asylum-seekers.

Mr. Rawanduzy, 42, describes himself as an immigration activist and a former refugee who left Iraq in 2009, two years after a suicide bombing in Erbil wounded him.

Mr. Faraj is still furious that he followed the advice of Mr. Rawanduzy, widely known by his first name, Karwan, by rushing from Minsk back to the border. “Everyone knows him and everyone follows him,” he said. He added: “Karwan tricked us all on Facebook.”

	Mr. Rawanduzy, who also owns a restaurant, said it was “not for me to feel bad or guilty” about people persuaded by his posts. “It is up to the Iraqi and Kurdish government to feel bad for all the reasons people want to escape.”
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HEADLINE	11/22 Gas prices are high in California
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/gas-prices-california.html
GIST	<p>For so many of us, the upcoming holiday season offers a moment of normalcy in what has been a long and lonely pandemic.</p> <p>With the protection of Covid-19 vaccines, extended families are planning to reunite after being apart for months, if not years. Couples are meeting their in-laws for the first time, as well as their siblings’ new babies.</p> <p>One in five Californians is expected to travel 50 miles or more this Thanksgiving, a major jump from the depths of the pandemic last year, according to AAA.</p> <p>But over the past few weeks, those dreamy itineraries have been complicated by soaring fuel prices.</p> <p>In California, the average cost of a gallon of gas is currently \$4.71, the highest in the nation. A few weeks ago, the prices here broke a record that was set in 2012 and have only continued to inch up since.</p> <p>The coronavirus deserves much of the blame. Gas production fell when demand plummeted last year amid stay-at-home orders, and it hasn’t caught up as commuters and tourists return.</p> <p>Nationwide, the average cost of a gallon of fuel is \$3.41, compared with \$2.11 at the same time last year. In other words, our much-anticipated road trips have gotten roughly 50 percent more expensive.</p> <p>Over the weekend, my colleagues published a story about Americans who are canceling vacations and rejiggering their budgets to cope with pain at the pump.</p> <p>Kellen Browning, a New York Times reporter based in San Francisco, interviewed drivers in the city’s NoPa neighborhood who were lined up at an Arco charging \$4.49 a gallon. In other parts of the city, prices have reached as high as \$5.85.</p> <p>Bay Area residents told Browning that they had started targeting certain gas stations to try to save a few bucks, or filled up small amounts at a time to soften the blow to their bank accounts.</p> <p>Browning himself avoids filling gas in the city when he can. He knows there are cheaper stations along I-80 on the way to Davis, where he often travels to visit his family.</p> <p>“I try to time it so that my tank is close to empty near one of those places,” he told me. “When my colleagues on the East Coast were reporting on people’s frustration with gas prices that were between \$3.50 and \$4, that sounded like an absolute steal.”</p> <p>Last week, President Biden asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate whether oil and gas companies were engaging in “illegal conduct” that was driving up prices. Some polling data links the president’s low approval ratings to high fuel costs.</p> <p>Here in California, hefty taxes have long made gas prices the highest in the nation. But fuel got even more expensive after an atmospheric storm pummeled Northern California last month.</p> <p>The heavy rains inundated oil refineries with water, which affected gas production in the region, The Los Angeles Times reported. The subsequent cost increases then trickled south to the rest of the state.</p>

	<p>Browning told me that some Californians he spoke to said the high gas prices had made them more willing to buy electric cars. Others said it had persuaded them to do all their holiday shopping online.</p> <p>Some blamed Gov. Gavin Newsom, OPEC, inflation or Biden for their significantly lighter wallets after filling up their tanks.</p> <p>“But overall, I would say the theme was a general resigned frustration and confusion about why they had to pay so much,” Browning said. “At this point, if I can find gas under \$4.50 per gallon, I think of it as a good deal, sadly.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 US envoy rips Russian disinformation
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/22/julie-fisher-russia-must-help-belarus-lukashenko-e/
GIST	<p>Friction between the European Union and Russia-backed Belarus escalated Monday, while a top U.S. diplomat in the region called on Moscow to exert its influence over Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko to stop inflaming regional tensions.</p> <p>U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Julie D. Fisher, a career diplomat appointed by former President Donald Trump, said Monday that Russia could play a constructive role amid European claims that the Lukashenko government has attempted to flood Middle Eastern migrants into Poland, Lithuania and other EU nations as a way to destabilize the region and protest EU and U.S. economic sanctions.</p> <p>“Russian disinformation efforts use actions in Belarus such as the migrant crisis to stoke tensions and undermine European unity and trans-Atlantic unity,” Ms. Fisher said Monday. “But it is important to recognize that Moscow has influence, unique influence over the Lukashenko regime. And we welcome Moscow using that influence in a way that moves Belarus forward.”</p> <p>She made the remarks on a video call hosted by the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars at a moment of rising regional tension over Belarus. Mr. Lukashenko on Monday once again sharply criticized the EU, this time calling out what he said was the bloc’s refusal to hold talks on the migrant standoff.</p> <p>A week after EU officials announced plans to level sanctions against the Lukashenko government for flying migrants from Iraq and other Middle East nations into Belarus as a pathway into Europe, Mr. Lukashenko publicly demanded on Monday that the migrants should be allowed to enter EU territory.</p> <p>Mr. Lukashenko specifically urged Germany to accommodate about 2,000 migrants who have remained on Belarus’ border with Poland in recent days, and openly slammed EU officials for refusing to talk. “We must demand that the Germans take them,” the Belarusian leader said, according to a report from Moscow by The Associated Press.</p> <p>The Belarus leader accused Western governments and aid organizations of using the migrant standoff to score “publicity points” against his government, according to the country’s BelTA news agency.</p> <p>“We will cope with these people ourselves if Berlin does not take them in. What are we supposed to do? There’s no other way around it. But we should urge Berlin to take them in,” Mr. Lukashenko said.</p> <p>The Belarus regime has been under steady pressure since a widely discredited 2020 election gave Mr. Lukashenko, in power since 1994, another term in office. EU officials have accused Mr. Lukashenko of engineering the migrant surge as part of a “hybrid attack” as retaliation for EU sanctions after the Lukashenko government cracked down on pro-democracy demonstrations.</p> <p>Russian role?</p>

But the migrant situation has prompted some analysts to claim Mr. Lukashenko is being used by Russia to try and foment EU political divisions over immigration and to destabilize Poland and Lithuania at a time when Moscow's own relations with the West are on shaky ground.

The Biden administration has tied the migrant crisis at the border to the Kremlin, claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin's government is using Belarus to signal his unhappiness with the U.S. and its Western allies and to cloak Moscow's border troop build-up and military intimidation campaign targeting other former Soviet states in Ukraine and Georgia. Polish officials said there were over 300 attempts by migrants on Sunday to get through a razor-wire border fence separating Belarus from the EU nation.

Many of the hundreds of Iraqis stuck in limbo in Belarus have booked flights back home, while others remain under guard in crowded migrant centers on the Belarus side of the border. Officials said over the weekend that of about 1,900 migrants in those centers, more than 1,200 are Iraqis. About 700 have applied for international protection and are waiting for a decision on whether they will be allowed to stay in the EU.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has begun warning of a possible new migrant surge by the Lukashenko regime — this time from Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Mr. Morawiecki claimed on Sunday to have knowledge of "diplomatic" contacts that Belarus and Russia had with Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. "There is a threat of an even more difficult scenario," he said. "There will most probably be an attempt at using the crisis in Afghanistan as a new act in the migration crisis, putting to use the West's remorse related to the disorderly pullout from Afghanistan."

Mr. Morawiecki said "only the full pullback of the migrants and steps toward deescalation can lead back to any kind of a constructive scenario with Lukashenko."

Regional experts say Mr. Lukashenko has engineered the migrant crisis to pressure the EU into granting sanctions relief.

Oleg Ignatov with the International Crisis Group, in a Q&A analysis published by the group on Monday, said the Lukashenko government has already "drawn an analogy between the present situation and the Greek-Turkish border crisis in 2015."

"In that crisis, more than a million refugees from the war in Syria entered the EU, and Brussels cut a deal with Ankara to halt further entries," he said. "It committed to provide [\$6.7 billion] in exchange for Ankara's agreement to prevent the migrants from leaving its territory."

Like Turkey, Mr. Ignatov added, Belarus "is angling for a deal of its own."

Ms. Fisher suggested in her own remarks on Monday that the Biden administration will stand with the EU in efforts to confront the Lukashenko government.

"As long as the regime in Belarus refuses to respect its international obligations and commitments, undermines the peace and security of Europe, and continues to repress and abuse people seeking to live in freedom, we will continue to pressure the Lukashenko regime and we will not lessen our calls for accountability," she said.

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HEADLINE	11/22 White House rejects return of lockdowns
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/22/white-house-rejects-return-covid-19-shutdowns-euro/
GIST	<p>The White House said Monday it has no plans to shut down the economy again as COVID-19 chaos seizes Europe, with lockdowns meant to thwart a fourth wave triggering violent protests.</p> <p>A German official declared his countrymen will be "vaccinated, cured or dead."</p>

Austrians were told to stay home for 10 days, starting Monday, except to go to work or school, or to get groceries or exercise, prompting thousands to protest in the streets of Vienna. Similar protests against a partial COVID-19 lockdown broke out in the Netherlands, resulting in fires and clashes with police, and tens of thousands of Belgians took to the streets as politicians warned of a virus crackdown.

White House COVID-19 Coordinator Jeff Zients said the U.S. has no interest in joining the fracas.

“No, we are not headed in that direction. We have the tools to accelerate the path out of this pandemic — widely available vaccinations, booster shots, kid shots, therapeutics, including monoclonal antibodies to help those who contract the virus,” he said at a COVID-19 task force briefing. “We can curb the spread of the virus without having to in any way shut down our economy.”

Viral spikes in Europe tend to augur what’s in store for Americans. Outbreaks in Italy and Spain at the start of the pandemic preceded a crush of cases in New York City, and a variant known as alpha battered the United Kingdom before walloping the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Mr. Biden faces pushback over workplace vaccine mandates but he has avoided talk of 2020-style restrictions, preferring instead to promote vaccines and pre-purchases of millions of courses of COVID-19 treatment pills.

Any push to renew draconian business restrictions would be devastating for Mr. Biden and is “just dead — dead on arrival,” said Arthur Caplan, a director of the division of medical ethics at the New York University Grossman School of Medicine.

“Politically, he’s already in trouble on the economy. Restricting the economy would seal the fate of the congressional elections,” Mr. Caplan said.

“I think there’s no evidence you can control this stupid virus by locking people up. You get a little relief and then boom, we’re back again,” he added. “The toll of restrictions — mass restrictions — is just huge. It’s completely untenable if you have an option that is purely pharmaceutical.”

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis recently placed medical breakthroughs over restrictions as his state battles a Mountain West surge. He said he does not plan to issue a statewide mask mandate because cases are comparable to New Mexico, despite its mask rules, and “scientists simply don’t know why our region has a spike.”

“We wouldn’t be here talking about this if everybody was vaccinated,” Mr. Polis, a Democrat, said at a press conference this month. “If you are not vaccinated you are going to get COVID. Maybe this week, maybe this month, maybe next year.”

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat who recently won reelection after fending off attacks over COVID-19 closures, spent his virus briefing Monday promoting boosters and a program that connects employers and workers looking to recover from the pandemic doldrums, rather than shut down again.

Besides vaccines and know-how, he said, “We’ve got other treatments, monoclonal antibodies, which we didn’t have. We’ve got the antivirals, and lot more tools in our toolbox, thank God.”

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser this week lifted a city mask mandate.

Erie County officials in Buffalo, New York, bucked the trend and said Monday they would reimpose a mask mandate on Tuesday. If cases don’t go down, the county will take a look at vaccine mandates in “phase two” before eyeing capacity restrictions or shutdowns in phases three and four if the first steps don’t work.

“My own view is that more restrictive measures would be brought into play only if there was a substantial rise in COVID-related hospitalizations that threatened the overall capacity of the health care system,” said

Daniel Kuritzkes, the chief of the division of infectious diseases at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Mr. Zients said decisions on how to manage the virus are frequently done at the local level because community transmission and vaccination rates differ, though he emphasized scientific interventions.

"We need to use the tools we have and get more people vaccinated, to keep people safe without going backward in any shape or form," he said.

He rejected economic lockdowns as counterparts across the pond grapple with the fallout from restrictions that range from mandatory vaccinations in Austria starting Feb. 1 — the first such step in the West — to a "partial lockdown" requiring bars and restaurants in the Netherlands to close early. Protests in Rotterdam led to standoffs with police, who deployed tear gas and water cannons on protesters who had hurled fireworks at them.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte called the protests "pure violence" by "idiots," and Belgian leader Alexander de Croo called a similar protest by 35,000 in Brussels "absolutely unacceptable," according to Agence France-Presse.

In Germany, departing Chancellor Angela Merkel said infections are doubling every 12 days in a "highly dramatic situation," prompting a dire warning from a top health official.

"Probably by the end of this winter, as is sometimes cynically said, pretty much everyone in Germany will be vaccinated, cured or dead," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said.

He promoted shots from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna as the Mercedes-Benz and Rolls-Royce of vaccines, though he hasn't ruled out another widespread lockdown as Ms. Merkel hinted that stronger measures will be needed.

About 67% of Germans are fully vaccinated but rates are far lower in eastern regions such as Saxony, where cultural sites, restaurants, bars and Christmas markets will be shut down for three weeks, according to Deutsche Welle media.

Some people see Europe's viral surge as a direct warning for the U.S., where cases have climbed to more than 90,000 per day after a decrease to the low 70,000s in late October. Hospitalizations have ticked above 50,000.

It's not as bad as Thanksgiving week last year, when the U.S. recorded 170,000 cases per day and averaged 90,000 hospitalizations ahead of a vaccine rollout that began in December. But the numbers are headed in the wrong direction.

"We're experiencing the beginning of a winter wave, the consequences of too many unvaccinated and the need for boosters to halt infection," said Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine.

Scientists say the current spike is driven by the fast-moving delta variant, which struck right as antibody responses from early vaccinations started to wane. Plus, the U.S., like Europe, might have relaxed mask guidance prematurely and opened the door for unvaccinated people to shed face coverings, too.

Analysts said they don't expect European governments to be deterred from the strong-arm positions they are staking out, even amid protests.

"It's not surprising Europe would potentially be headed down that path. Many of the countries are outright socialist nations where there is an inherent trust the government has the answer to all things and to all problems," said Colin Reed, a GOP strategist and who worked as a spokesman for former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican.

In the U.S., however, “the fact Biden is pumping the brakes speaks to political peril that advocating such a policy might bring on,” Mr. Reed said. “It’s pretty clear Americans long ago grew tired of the forced mandates. I think the way out of this is through vaccines and getting people to make the decision on their own to get vaccinated.”

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said every country is different but the U.S. has the luxury of ample vaccines and Mr. Biden’s health team has not recommended shutdowns.

Officials advised people to avoid holiday gatherings last year, but the Biden administration told Americans it should be safe to enjoy Thanksgiving with fellow vaccinated people on Thursday.

The White House is pleading with roughly 47 million adults and 12 million teens who are eligible for shots yet remain unvaccinated, to come forward for the shots. They also called on vaccinated Americans to obtain an extra dose of one of three approved vaccines if they got their initial series at least six months ago.

Cyrus Shahpar, the COVID-19 data coordinator for the White House, tweeted that 461,000 people came forward to get vaccinated on Sunday and 890,000 came forward for a booster shot.

As it stands, 4 in 10 Americans are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 while 18% of the fully vaccinated — about 35 million people — have received a booster.

Whether it is enough to help the U.S. avoid a full-scale disaster and European-style standoffs in the streets will be seen in the coming weeks.

“People do have fatigue. I’ve been triple-vaxxed now and I’m tired of the restrictions,” Democratic strategist Brad Bannon said. “I think we’ll get a true test as people will be gathering together for Thanksgiving and the holidays. If we get through that without a large outbreak, then we’ll be in good shape. I think it’s a function of whether people get vaccinated or not.”

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HEADLINE	11/22 Truck driver shortage: low pay, long hours
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/nov/22/indentured-servitude-low-pay-and-grueling-conditions-fueling-us-truck-driver-shortage
GIST	<p>At Joe’s Travel Plaza, a neon-lit rest stop on California’s main interstate highway, truckers can get a brief respite from life on the road. There’s a TV lounge, a laundry room and a free shower if you buy at least 75 gallons of fuel. There’s even a pair of massage chairs in the corner.</p> <p>But drivers here are worried about the future. The supply chain crisis roiling the US has inevitably drawn them in, with a shortage of drivers being blamed for containers idling in ports and packages being delayed for months.</p> <p>The trucking industry’s main trade body has said America is short about 80,000 drivers, a figure that’s made headlines around the country.</p> <p>Truckers say the problem isn’t a shortage of qualified drivers; there’s plenty of people who have been through the training programs and hold a commercial driver’s license. The rot, they say, is far more systemic: low pay, long hours and an industry that treats drivers like “cannon fodder”, churning out new recruits who inevitably quit because the job is so grueling.</p> <p>“There is no driver shortage; there’s a retention problem,” said Mike Doncaster, a 30-year veteran and driver trainer who parked his big rig at Joe’s Travel Plaza for the night, before heading up to Canada with another load of vegetables.</p>

He said of the five drivers he's trained in recent years, only one stuck with the industry. "It's not a job; it's a lifestyle – and new recruits don't receive enough pay for the lifestyle."

This month, the American Trucking Association said the nation will need to recruit nearly 1 million more drivers in the next decade to keep up with demands.

Bob Costello, the chief economist for the American Trucking Association, said in a statement that the reasons behind the latest shortage are myriad – an increasing demand for freight, pandemic-related challenges, early retirements and driving school and DMV closures, to name a few. "There has been tremendous pressure on the driver pool," as a result, he said.

But labor economists, trucking experts and the drivers themselves described an industry where deregulation and constant pressure to deliver goods at ever-cheaper prices has resulted in working conditions so poor and pay rates so low that they amounted to "indentured servitude". As a result, companies that trained and recruited new drivers often had turnover rates as high as 100% in a year, they said.

Rise of the 'owner-operator' scheme

Trucking used to be a high-paying, blue-collar job, but since the industry was deregulated in 1980, pay rates have dropped dramatically, said economics professor Michael Belzer, who authored the book *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*.

One of the biggest problems is that most drivers get paid by the mile, often meaning that while they're waiting to load their trucks, stuck in traffic jams, or on mandatory rest breaks, they aren't making money, said Belzer.

"Drivers earn a piece-rate wage that may look attractive but, when they realize the big promises aren't real, they exit," said Belzer, who drove a truck in the 1980s, but is now a professor at Wayne State University in Michigan. "If you can work construction and get paid \$20 an hour and be home every night, why would you drive a truck and get paid \$10 an hour to not be home for weeks?"

In an industry so closely linked to economic ups and downs, there's also a lot of volatility, said Todd Spencer, the president of the owner-operator Independent Drivers Association, which represents independent truckers. At various times in the last decade, including after the coronavirus first hit, there were too many drivers on the market, he said, but the pandemic sent people on a "buying binge".

"At Lowe's and Home Depot, suddenly everything they had was very valuable, because everyone was remodeling their homes," he said "We're talking about an increase in import goods of 30 – maybe 50%. It's buried our supply chain."

That prompted a huge recruitment effort to find new truckers. But as soon as the kinks in the supply chain work themselves out, Spencer believes the demand for truckers will drop.

There are still some decent paying truck driving jobs with private carriers, but a lot of the cheapest ones are done by companies that are constantly recruiting to train new drivers, said Steve Viscelli, a sociology professor at the University of Pennsylvania, who authored *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream*.

Viscelli said the training programs offer to train recruits at no cost as long as they drive for the company for a year. Otherwise, the new drivers are told they will have to pay back training fees to the tune of about \$8,000, which keeps them bound to the company, even if the pay is low for long hours on the road.

"What the industry wants is super cheap, flexible labor and that's what it's had for years," said Viscelli, who described the situation for trainees as "debt peonage". "They've been cycling through literally millions of people, who decide to become truck drivers and then get burned by the industry."

Some new hires end up with an even worse deal when they are roped into dubious “owner-operator” schemes in which they are enticed to lease trucks from their companies, Viscelli said. Such schemes have [come under scrutiny](#) at companies like Uber, with drivers saying they wind up earning far less than initially promised.

A major class-action lawsuit, representing as many as 40,000 drivers, has recently cast light on such arrangements. Drivers sued the trucking company New Prime Trucking, alleging it used driver trainees as employees, failed to pay them minimum wage and that many lost money after being encouraged to start their own owner-operator businesses.

The lead plaintiff, Massachusetts driver Dominic Oliveira, said he was lured into signing the papers to lease a truck – and then wound up seeing his pay statements go hundreds of dollars into the negative because of fees the company deducted, according to his class-action lawsuit.

The case went all the way to the supreme court and resulted in a settlement this July, with the company paying drivers \$28m.

New Prime Trucking did not respond to a Guardian request for comment but has previously said the company stands by its independent contractor model, but felt “moving past this litigation was the right thing to do”.

The attractive bonus offers and recruitment bonuses advertised by trucking companies for new hires also rarely pan out to be as lucrative as they sound, said Norita Taylor of the the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association.

One such offer, that made rounds on social media, promised to pay truckers as much as \$14,000 every week – or \$728,000 a year because of the trucker shortage.

But when [NPR’s Planet Money ran down the real story](#), a spokesperson for the company explained that drivers would first have to own their own truck, move to Texas and get the proper certificates to haul “frac sand” used by the fracking industry. Then the company acknowledged it didn’t actually pay by the week, but by the load.

“When we hear about these bonuses and recruitment fees, we don’t know of anyone who actually ever gets them,” said Taylor.

One of the most deadly jobs in the nation

At Joe’s Travel Plaza, truckers say one of their biggest worries is safety on the road.

Driver Raul Herrera sits in the corner of the trucker’s lounge eating a cup of noodles, reading on his cellphone about an accident in which an inexperienced trucker lost control of his semi-trailer and killed four people. The driver was found guilty of vehicular homicide last month.

Herrera worries about a federal plan that will allow 18-year-olds to drive trucks as “apprentices”, while the current law requires truckers to be 21. The provision to put teenaged truckers on the road was tucked into the recently signed federal infrastructure bill and seen as a [major victory](#) for trucking industry recruitment efforts. But truckers, who already work one of the most deadly jobs in the nation, were horrified.

“You don’t want to put new guys on the road, even if there’s a trucker shortage,” said Herrera. “It’s not safe.”

For veteran trucker Doncaster, a lot of the problems would be smoothed out if truckers could be paid for all their time on the road with fair and uniform pay rates. This, he said, might stop the “race to the bottom” that drives shipping prices ever cheaper, often at the expense of truckers.

But, he said, if companies don’t stop treating newer drivers like they are disposable, things won’t change.

	“It doesn’t matter to them if they can only keep a driver in a truck for a year,” he said of companies’ current outlook. “They’re making money.”
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HEADLINE	11/22 Russia: West military buildup on borders
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/22/russia-accuses-west-of-building-up-forces-on-its-borders
GIST	<p>Russia has accused the west of building up forces on its borders as well as those of Belarus in remarks that appeared tailored to mirror recent US warnings about Moscow’s aggressive positioning towards Ukraine.</p> <p>The Kremlin, as well as Russian intelligence, security, and diplomatic officials, have all gone on the offensive in the past 48 hours after Vladimir Putin publicly instructed his diplomats that tensions should be maintained with the west as a form of aggressive deterrence.</p> <p>US and Ukrainian officials have said that Russia has amassed nearly 100,000 troops in the border regions near Ukraine and warned it was seeking a pretext in order to justify a major intervention in the country.</p> <p>In a public statement on Monday, Russia’s foreign intelligence service announced that the situation was similar to that with Georgia in 2008, where Russia fought a short war against the government of Mikheil Saakashvili.</p> <p>“The provocative policy of the United States and the European Union, which has deliberately strengthened Kyiv’s sense of permissiveness and impunity, causes extreme concern,” the agency wrote in the statement.</p> <p>Also on Monday, the deputy head of Russia’s security council accused Nato members of increasing military activity in Black Sea, eastern Europe, and Arctic regions. Alexander Grebenkin, the body’s deputy secretary, said that the probability of a border incident was “not decreasing”.</p> <p>A foreign ministry spokeswoman complained about recent joint US-Estonian military airborne exercise, while a Kremlin spokesman pointed to US weapons provided to Kyiv.</p> <p>Russia has denied that it is planning to launch an attack. But Putin has admitted that raising tensions in eastern Europe serves Russia’s interests.</p> <p>“Relative tension has actually developed there,” Putin said while addressing Russian diplomats last week. “Firstly, it is necessary that they keep in this kind of state as long as possible, that they don’t even think to cause any kind of conflict we don’t want to see on our western frontiers, and we don’t need any conflicts.”</p> <p>US officials have said that they do not know whether Putin is planning to launch a larger invasion of Ukraine but that the country has been methodically moving the needed elements for an offensive operation toward Russia’s western borders since a massive buildup in April.</p> <p>Russia has sent men, money and weapons to fight in Ukraine since 2014, annexing the Crimean peninsula and sparking a war in the Donbass region that has left more than 14,000 dead.</p> <p>In an interview with the Military Times, the head of Ukraine’s defence intelligence agency said Russia had amassed more than 92,000 troops around Ukraine’s borders and was preparing for an attack by the end of January or beginning of February.</p> <p>A slide published by the outlet showed that Russia had 40 battalion tactical groups, or BTGs, stationed near the border with Ukraine. That number was lower than an earlier buildup in April of this year, when Russia had an estimated 53 BTGs, consisting of 105,000 troops, in the border region.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Ethiopia PM vows to lead troops in war
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/22/ethiopian-pm-vows-to-marshal-troops-in-war-against-rebels

GIST	<p>Ethiopia's prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has vowed to lead his country's troops "from the battlefield", the latest dramatic step by the Nobel Peace prize winner in a devastating year-long war with rebel groups.</p> <p>"Starting tomorrow, I will mobilise to the front to lead the defence forces," Abiy, said in a statement posted on Twitter on Monday.</p> <p>"Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the front."</p> <p>Abiy's statement came as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group continued to press towards Addis Ababa, claiming control of the town of Shewa Robit, just 220km northeast of the capital by road.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war between Ethiopian and allied forces and fighters from the country's northern Tigray region. A de facto blockade on Tigray has triggered a humanitarian crisis and prevented the delivery of essential medical supplies.</p> <p>The US and others have warned that Africa's second-most populous country could fracture and destabilise the whole Horn of Africa.</p> <p>Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2019 after he signed a deal to end a nearly 20-year military stalemate with Eritrea after their 1998-2000 border war.</p> <p>But last November he sent troops into Ethiopia's northernmost Tigray region to topple the TPLF, saying the move came in response to TPLF attacks on army camps.</p> <p>Though he promised a swift victory, by late June the TPLF had regrouped and retaken most of Tigray including its capital Mekelle, prompting the federal army to largely withdraw from the region.</p> <p>Since then the TPLF has pushed into the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions.</p> <p>It has also formed an alliance with other insurgent groups including the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which is active in the Oromia region surrounding Addis Ababa.</p> <p>Fears of a rebel advance on the capital have prompted several countries including the US and the UK to pull out non-essential diplomatic staff.</p> <p>These countries are also urging their citizens to leave Ethiopia while commercial flights are still available.</p> <p>In a year's time, Abiy's government has gone from describing the conflict as a "law enforcement operation" to an "existential war".</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Holiday travel crush begins: airlines ready?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/business/thanksgiving-holiday-travel-airlines.html
GIST	<p>Widespread flight cancellations. Excruciating waits for customer service. Unruly passengers.</p> <p>And that was all before the holiday travel season.</p> <p>Even in normal times, the days around Thanksgiving are a delicate period for the airlines. But this week is the industry's biggest test since the pandemic began, as millions more Americans — emboldened by vaccinations and reluctant to spend another holiday alone — are expected to take to the skies than during last year's holidays.</p> <p>A lot is riding on the carriers' ability to pull it off smoothly.</p>

“For many people, this will be the first time they’ve gotten together with family, maybe in a year, year and a half, maybe longer, so it’s very significant,” said Kathleen Bangs, a former commercial pilot who is a spokeswoman for FlightAware, an aviation data provider. “If it goes poorly, that’s when people might rethink travel plans for Christmas. And that’s what the airlines don’t want.”

The Transportation Security Administration said it expected to screen about 20 million passengers at airports in the 10 days that began Friday, a figure approaching prepandemic levels. Two million passed through checkpoints on Saturday alone, about twice as many as on the Saturday before last Thanksgiving.

Delta Air Lines and United Airlines both said they expected to fly only about 12 percent fewer passengers than they did in 2019. And United said it expected the Sunday after Thanksgiving to be its busiest day since the pandemic began 20 months ago.

Many Thanksgiving travelers seem to be going about their travel routines as usual, with some now-familiar pandemic twists.

“Airports are busy right now, and everything seems back to normal,” said Naveen Gunendran, 22, a University of Illinois student who was flying on United from Chicago to San Francisco on Saturday to visit relatives. “But we’re all packed together, and we just have to hope everybody is being safe.”

The pent-up travel demand has elevated the cost of tickets. Hopper, an app that predicts flight prices, said that the average domestic flight during Thanksgiving week was on track to be about \$293 round-trip this year, \$48 more than last year — although \$42 cheaper than in 2019.

While the industry is projecting optimism about easy traveling, the influx of passengers has injected an element of uncertainty into a fragile system still reeling from the pandemic’s devastation. Some airlines have experienced recent troubles that rippled for days — stymying travel plans for thousands of passengers — as the carriers struggled to get pilots and flight attendants in place for delayed and rescheduled flights, a task complicated by thin staffing.

“We’ve said numerous times: The pandemic is unprecedented and extremely complex — it was messy going into it, and it’s messy as we fight to emerge from it,” the president and chief operating officer of Southwest Airlines, Mike Van de Ven, said in a lengthy note to customers last month.

His apology came after Southwest canceled nearly 2,500 flights over a four-day stretch — nearly 18 percent of its scheduled flights, according to FlightAware — as a brief bout of bad weather and an equally short-lived air traffic control staffing shortage snowballed.

Weeks later, American Airlines suffered a similar collapse, canceling more than 2,300 flights in four days — nearly 23 percent of its schedule — after heavy winds slowed operations at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, its largest hub.

American and Southwest have said they are working to address the problems, offering bonuses to encourage employees to work throughout the holiday period, stepping up hiring and pruning ambitious flight plans.

Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, a union representing roughly 50,000 flight attendants at 17 airlines, gave the carriers good marks for their preparations.

“First and foremost, we are getting demand back after the biggest crisis aviation has ever faced,” she said.

“I think there has been a lot of good planning,” she added. “And barring a major weather event, I think that the airlines are going to be able to handle the demand.”

According to FlightAware, just 0.4 percent of flights were canceled on Sunday, which the T.S.A. said was nearly as busy as the Sunday before Thanksgiving in 2019.

Major airlines have just started to report profits again, and only after factoring in billions of dollars of federal aid. While the aid allowed carriers to avoid sweeping layoffs during the pandemic, tens of thousands of employees took generous buyouts or early-retirement packages or volunteered to take extended leaves of absence.

That has made ramping back up more difficult, and the pandemic has created new challenges. Flight crews have had to contend with overwork and disruptive and belligerent passengers, leaving them drained and afraid for their safety.

Helene Albert, 54, a longtime flight attendant for American Airlines, said she took an 18-month leave by choice that was offered because of the pandemic. When she returned to work on Nov. 1 on domestic routes, she said, she saw a difference in passengers from when she began her leave.

“People are hostile,” she said. “They don’t know how to wear masks and they act shocked when I tell them we don’t have alcohol on our flights anymore.”

The number of such unruly passengers has fallen since the Federal Aviation Administration cracked down on the behavior earlier this year. But the agency has so far begun investigations into 991 episodes involving passenger misbehavior in 2021, more than in the last seven years combined. In some cases, the disruptions have forced flights to be delayed or even diverted — an additional strain on air traffic.

Layered on top of the industry’s struggles during the holiday season is the perennial threat of inclement weather. Forecasters have cautioned in recent days that gathering storm systems were threatening to deliver gusty winds and rain that could interfere with flights, but for the most part, the weather is not expected to cause major disruptions.

“Overall, the news is pretty good in terms of the weather in general across the country cooperating with travel,” said Jon Porter, the chief meteorologist for AccuWeather. “We’re not dealing with any big storms across the country, and in many places the weather will be quite favorable for travel.”

Even so, AAA, the travel services organization, recommended that airline passengers arrive two hours ahead of departure for domestic flights and three hours ahead for international destinations during the Thanksgiving travel wave.

Some lawmakers warned that a Monday vaccination deadline for all federal employees could disrupt T.S.A. staffing at airports, resulting in long lines at security checkpoints, but the agency said those concerns were unfounded.

“The compliance rate is very high, and we do not anticipate any disruptions because of the vaccination requirements,” R. Carter Langston, a T.S.A. spokesman, said in a statement on Friday.

With many people able to do their jobs or classes remotely, some travelers left town early, front-running what are typically the busiest travel days before the holiday.

TripIt, a travel app that organizes itineraries, said 33 percent of holiday travelers booked Thanksgiving flights for last Friday and Saturday, according to its reservation data. (That number was slightly down from last year, when 35 percent of travelers left on the Friday and Saturday before Thanksgiving, and marginally higher than in 2019, when 30 percent of travelers did so, TripIt said.)

Among those taking advantage of the flexibility was Emilia Lam, 18, a student at New York University who traveled home to Houston on Saturday. She is doing her classes this week remotely, she said, and planned her early getaway to get ahead of the crush. “The flights are going to be way more crowded,” she said, as Thursday approaches.

HEADLINE	11/22 Europe: 'vaccinated, recovered or dead'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/world/europe/covid-europe-surge-protests.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Austria went into a major lockdown on Monday to try to break the strong fourth wave of Covid spreading across Europe, while the German health minister, Jens Spahn, warned that by the end of this winter “just about everyone in Germany will probably be either vaccinated, recovered or dead.”</p> <p>“Immunity will be reached,” Mr. Spahn said at a Berlin news conference. “The question is whether it’s via vaccination or infection, and we explicitly recommend the path via vaccination.”</p> <p>European governments are toughening their measures against Covid in the face of soaring infection rates — more than two million new cases each week, the most since the pandemic began — and popular resistance, with violent protests over the weekend in numerous countries.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of people protested official crackdowns and vaccine requirements in Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Switzerland and Croatia, with scattered violence and police use of tear gas and water cannons. Some protesters were organized by far-right parties, but many were simply fed up with almost two years of intermittent state controls over their lives in the name of public health.</p> <p>Ahmed Aboutaleb, the mayor of Rotterdam, where some of the worst protests erupted, called them an “orgy of violence” and said football hooligans were believed to have been involved.</p> <p>Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, defended the right to demonstrate. “But what I will never accept is that idiots use sheer violence against the people who work for you and me every day to keep this country safe under the guise of: ‘We are dissatisfied.’ ”</p> <p>Europe is once again the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, accounting for more than half the world’s reported Covid deaths this month, according to the World Health Organization. The four countries with the world’s highest rates of reported new cases in the past week are Austria and three that border it, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic; 27 of the top 29 are in Europe.</p> <p>With vaccination rates lagging and winter approaching, more governments are ringing alarm bells.</p> <p>Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany told her Christian Democratic party on Monday that the situation is “highly dramatic” and that the latest surge is worse than anything Germany had suffered so far.</p> <p>In what may be her last month as chancellor, as a new government is being formed, she warned that hospitals would soon be overwhelmed unless the fourth wave of the virus is broken, and called on Germany’s 16 states to enforce even tighter restrictions to block the spread.</p> <p>Germany, like many European countries, is at the same time pressing for citizens to get booster shots. But it faces a dwindling supply of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, which was partly developed in the country.</p> <p>While the European Medicines Agency is poised to approve the vaccine for use on children ages 5 to 11 this week, first doses for children are not scheduled to be delivered to European Union countries until Dec. 20, Mr. Spahn said.</p> <p>On Thursday, 553,000 vaccines were administered in Germany in one day, a daily total not seen since early August. Three quarters of those shots were boosters, according to the health ministry.</p> <p>Neighboring Austria on Monday began its fourth lockdown, one of the few in Western Europe since vaccines became widely available. Most stores, restaurants, sporting venues and cultural institutions shut, leaving the streets cold and quiet in the weeks before Christmas.</p>

The lockdown, which only allows people to leave home to go to work or to procure groceries or medicines, will last at least 10 days and as many as 20 and comes after months of struggling attempts to halt the contagion through widespread testing and partial restrictions.

Austria has also announced that vaccination will be compulsory as of Feb. 1 — the first Western country to take that step, and one of only a handful around the world. Some critics, including the editorial board of the Financial Times, have called it too high a price in terms of individual freedom, and a sign of political failure.

Opposition to the measures has been led in Austria by the far-right Freedom Party, the third-largest in Parliament, which has been amplifying conspiracy theories about the vaccines, spreading doubt about their effectiveness and promoting ivermectin, a drug typically used to treat parasitic worms, mostly in horses, that has repeatedly failed against the coronavirus in clinical trials.

Alexander Schallenberg, Austria's chancellor, said he originally had opposed compulsory vaccination, but "we have too many political forces, flimsy vaccine skeptics and spreaders of fake news in this country."

On Saturday, some 40,000 Austrians marched in Vienna to protest the new measures.

France presents a contrast, in that President Emmanuel Macron has used more suasion. Proof of vaccination or a recent negative test is required to patronize restaurants and cinemas, which has encouraged many reluctant French to get vaccinated without a national mandate. But anti-vaccination groups remain active in France, as well.

About 68 percent of Germans and 66 percent of Austrians have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, and hospitals are mostly filled with those who have not been vaccinated at all. Early in the pandemic, scientists thought 70 to 80 percent vaccination might be enough for a population to reach "herd immunity." But the virus is now so widespread, with new variants arising and some vaccinated people suffering "breakthrough" infections, that many experts say herd immunity is unattainable.

Vaccination rates in most of Western Europe are higher, but the levels in Eastern Europe are far lower — from 59 percent in the Czech Republic to 24 percent in Bulgaria.

Belgium is highly vaccinated, at 75 percent, but a rise in cases has caused the government to impose tighter restrictions, including more working from home and wider mandatory mask wearing. That prompted a protest in Brussels on Sunday of an estimated 35,000 people near the European Union headquarters. Some protesters threw stones and set fires, the police made more than 40 arrests, and three officers were hurt.

Alexander de Croo, the prime minister of Belgium, called the violence "absolutely unacceptable." Like Mr. Rutte, he said Belgians were free to protest, but that "the way in which some demonstrators behaved had nothing to do with freedom." He continued: "It had nothing to do with whether vaccination was a good thing or not, this was criminal behavior."

In Greece, the government said on Monday that unvaccinated people would be barred from indoor spaces, including restaurants, cinemas, museums and gyms. Vaccination certificates for those older than 60 will be valid for only seven months, with people then required to get booster shots to maintain validity.

In Slovakia, the country's prime minister, Eduard Heger, announced a "lockdown for the unvaccinated" from Monday. Slovakia and the Czech Republic banned unvaccinated people from restaurants, pubs, shopping malls, public events and stores, except for those selling essential goods.

The W.H.O. chief for Europe, Hans Kluge, earlier this month blamed the region's woes on insufficient vaccination despite the availability of vaccines, and said that the continent could see half a million more deaths by February.

	“We must change our tactics, from reacting to surges of Covid-19 to preventing them from happening in the first place,” he said.
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HEADLINE	11/22 Criminal charges Home outbreak tossed
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/22/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#criminal-holyoke-soldiers-covid
GIST	<p>A Massachusetts state judge on Monday dismissed criminal charges against two administrators of the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home, where an outbreak of coronavirus led to 76 deaths, reasoning that the actions of administrators did not lead to the infections.</p> <p>The state’s attorney general, Maura Healey, had sought criminal charges of criminal neglect and permitting body injury to an older person against the two administrators based on their decision to combine two understaffed dementia units, crowding together infected and uninfected men.</p> <p>But Judge Edward J. McDonough Jr., of Hampden County Superior Court, wrote in his dismissal that he believed the five veterans named in the case had been exposed to the virus before the two units were merged, so the administrators could not be held legally responsible.</p> <p>“There was insufficiently reasonably trustworthy evidence presented to the grand jury that, had these two dementia units not been merged, the medical condition of any of these five veterans would have been materially different,” he wrote.</p> <p>Ms. Healey is weighing whether to appeal the decision, a spokeswoman said.</p> <p>“We are very disappointed in today’s ruling, especially on behalf of the innocent victims and families harmed by the defendants’ actions,” said Jillian Fennimore.</p> <p>The criminal charges against the two administrators — the superintendent Bennett Walsh and the medical director David Clinton — were believed to be the first in the country brought against nursing home staff, and the two could have faced years or even decades in prison if convicted.</p> <p>Because of staffing shortages, the facility consolidated the units, which had a total of 42 residents who had different Covid-19 statuses, and residents who were positive or symptomatic were placed six in a room that typically held four veterans. An independent investigation of the deaths quoted nurses who said they knew that the move to combine units would prove deadly to many of their patients.</p> <p>Relatives of the veterans who died at the facility expressed frustration at the judge’s decision on Monday.</p> <p>“Absolutely disgusting, our veterans and their families apparently are a disposable commodity,” wrote Susan Perez, whose father, James Miller, died at the home, adding, “Apparently no one is responsible for the deaths of the veterans and trauma to their families.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Federal work force: 90% vaccination
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/22/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#biden-vaccine-mandate-deadline
GIST	<p>More than 90 percent of federal employees will have had at least one coronavirus vaccine shot by the end of Monday, the deadline set by President Biden when he announced vaccine mandates earlier this fall, according to a senior administration official.</p> <p>The vast majority of those employees are fully vaccinated, and an additional 5 percent of employees are seeking or already have an exception or an extension, the official said. The news was first reported by Reuters.</p>

This means the Biden administration will have achieved 95 percent compliance with the president's requirement that federal employees have at least one shot or have an approved or pending exception or extension request by Nov. 22, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview an announcement that White House officials will make later in the day.

Mr. Biden's mandate for federal workers, announced in September, was part of an aggressive effort to combat the spread of the Delta variant, which has driven caseloads up to levels last recorded a year ago, before vaccines were widely available. The president also mandated vaccination for health care workers and ordered all companies with more than 100 workers to require vaccination or weekly testing for their employees.

"We've been patient," Mr. Biden said then, in a pointed message to people who refused to be vaccinated. "But our patience is wearing thin. And your refusal has cost all of us."

More than 3.5 million federal workers, both in the United States and around the world, are covered by Mr. Biden's mandate. Employees who have not complied, and do not have a pending or approved exception or extension request, will be expected to undergo education and counseling, the official said, followed by "additional enforcement steps."

On Wednesday morning, the Office of Management and Budget will release data on the percentage of employees at each agency who are in compliance with the requirement.

A personnel change in the White House's coronavirus team is expected next week. On Monday, Dr. Bechara Choucair, the former Chicago health commissioner whom Mr. Biden brought in to oversee the vaccination effort, will leave the administration, according to Jeff Zients, the White House coronavirus response coordinator.

Dr. Choucair was a senior executive at Kaiser Permanente before joining Mr. Biden's staff and is "returning to the West Coast after staying longer than originally planned," Mr. Zients said.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Thanksgiving nears, virus cases tick up
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/us-covid-cases-rising-thanksgiving.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>CHICAGO — A month ago, new coronavirus cases in the United States were ticking steadily downward and the worst of a miserable summer surge fueled by the Delta variant appeared to be over. But as Americans travel this week to meet far-flung relatives for Thanksgiving dinner, new virus cases are rising once more, especially in the Upper Midwest and Northeast.</p> <p>Federal medical teams have been dispatched to Minnesota to help at overwhelmed hospitals. Michigan is enduring its worst case surge yet, with daily caseloads doubling since the start of November. Even New England, where vaccination rates are high, is struggling, with Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire trying to contain major outbreaks.</p> <p>Nationally, case levels remain well below those seen in early September, when summer infections peaked, and are below those seen last Thanksgiving. But conditions are worsening rapidly, and this will not be the post-pandemic Thanksgiving that Americans had hoped for. More than 90,000 cases are being reported each day, comparable to early August, and more than 30 states are seeing sustained upticks in infections. In the hardest-hit places, hospitalizations are already climbing.</p> <p>"This thing is no longer just throwing curveballs at us — it's throwing 210 mile an hour curveballs at us," said Michael Osterholm, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota. He said that the virus had repeatedly defied predictions and continues to do so.</p>

The new rise in cases comes at a complicated moment. Last Thanksgiving, before vaccines were available, federal and local officials had firmly urged Americans to forgo holiday gatherings. But in sharp contrast, public health officials, [including Dr. Anthony S. Fauci](#), the nation's leading infectious-disease expert, have mostly suggested this year that vaccinated people could gather in relative safety.

In interviews across the country, Americans said they were not sure what to think.

Jess Helle-Morrissey, 43, a therapist who lives in St. Paul, Minn, said she has decided to host a dinner, though case rates in her state are among the country's worst. About 4,200 cases are emerging every day and hospitalizations are soaring in Minnesota.

"They are diligent maskers and don't take any extra risks," she said of her guests. "Everyone who is coming, I keep saying, is, you know, vaxxed to the max."

In important ways, the country is in better shape than during previous upticks. Doctors have learned more about how to treat the virus and experts are hopeful that [antiviral pills](#) will soon be approved. Most crucially, many Americans have been vaccinated. The availability of those shots — including the recent approval of booster doses for all adults — has raised confidence for many who said they planned to proceed with holiday celebrations.

But about 50,000 coronavirus patients are hospitalized nationwide, and tens of millions of Americans have declined to be vaccinated. The course of the virus in Europe, where [Austria](#) is entering a lockdown and some areas of [Germany](#) have shut down Christmas markets, has raised fears about just how high case numbers might rise in the United States.

"The last thing I want is what Austria is doing," said Dr. Allison Arwady, the public health commissioner in Chicago, where cases have started to rise. "I really, really don't want to go there."

In Austria, about 66 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated against the virus. In the United States, about 59 percent of the population has been.

Still, millions of Americans were forging ahead with holiday plans. Federal officials expected Thanksgiving air travel to approach prepandemic levels. And plenty of people who hit the road this year will be unvaccinated, unmasked and largely unworried about Covid-19.

Many experts said the wide availability of vaccines, now authorized for everyone 5 and older, as well as at-home testing, made it possible for vaccinated people to host a relatively safe, though not fully risk-free, gathering.

Dr. Arwady said she planned to spend the holiday with extended family members, all of whom are vaccinated except young children who are not eligible. While reports of new cases in [Illinois](#) have increased 62 percent in the last two weeks, she said she wanted vaccinated people to feel confident going about their life and to enjoy Thanksgiving.

"Is there the potential for some spread? Of course there is," said Dr. Arwady, who suggested that unvaccinated adults consider staying home. "Are the people who are vaccinated, even if they haven't gotten a booster, likely to end up in the hospital or die? They're really not."

Dr. Osterholm said he worried about breakthrough cases in vaccinated people who did not have booster shots and about the potential for future mutations of the virus. Still, he too said he would gather for the holiday with vaccinated family members who live nearby.

Many others who were interviewed, including in states with some of the highest infection rates, voiced exhaustion and frustration that the virus was even a consideration this holiday season, 20 months into the pandemic.

In New Mexico, which is averaging 1,400 cases a day, Bernice Medina, 37, a food truck operator, said she was uneasy when she gathered with her large family for the holidays last year but felt safer now because she was vaccinated. In Michigan, home to nearly one of every 10 new coronavirus cases nationwide, Dustin Johnston, 40, a photographer, said the vaccines made him confident enough to gather locally with older relatives.

“The vaccination, I think, changes everything,” said Mr. Johnston, whose state has the country’s highest rate of recent cases.

Officials who once urged caution were now deferring to individuals to make their own decisions.

“It’s really hard to tell people to stay away from their families,” said Mayor Katie Rosenberg of Wausau, Wis., where cases have surged to their highest levels since late 2020. “I can’t anymore.”

Dr. Rebecca Smith, an epidemiologist at the University of Illinois, said she planned to travel by vehicle with her children to see family but would get tested before and after.

“People want to get back to normal and we understand that — and there are ways to do that safely,” she said.

Still, Dr. Smith said she expected the outbreak in Illinois to continue to worsen as the virus rips across Midwestern and Northeastern states that largely avoided the worst of the summer surge. In the last two weeks, reports of new cases have increased by more than 40 percent in [Pennsylvania](#), by more than 80 percent in [Massachusetts](#) and by 70 percent in [Indiana](#).

Infection levels are also persistently high across much of the West, including in [Arizona](#) and [New Mexico](#), where hospitalizations are rising, and in [Alaska](#) and [Wyoming](#), which have started to improve after enduring major outbreaks. But case rates in California are relatively low, as they also are in the South, the region hit hardest over the summer.

Ahead of Thanksgiving 2020, the country was reporting 175,000 new infections a day and was midway through its worst case surge of the pandemic. Vaccines were still weeks away from being authorized, many schools were closed and at-home rapid tests were rare. But even as scientists warned that Covid-19 was unlikely to completely vanish, there was widespread optimism back then that vaccines could make the virus an afterthought in daily life.

“It was wicked bad last year during the holidays,” said Kirk Burrows, 26, a paramedic in Unity, Maine, who said he planned to stay home for another Thanksgiving. “I think it’s going to be worse this year.”

Mr. Burrows, who described long ambulance rides with coronavirus patients being transferred to hospitals hours away, said he thought many people had let their guard down as the pandemic persisted. [Maine](#) is routinely reporting more than 700 new cases a day, its most since the pandemic started, and hospitalizations have reached record levels.

“I think a lot of people are fed up,” Mr. Burrows said. “They got that glimmer of hope in June and July, and they’re trucking right on through. Now everyone’s used to it.”

Dr. James Volk, a vice president for Sanford Health in Fargo, N.D., where coronavirus hospitalizations have been persistently high, said he felt that fewer people were seeking medical advice about how to approach the holidays this year.

“I just think that people in general here have kind of moved on from that,” said Dr. Volk, who said he planned to stay home for Thanksgiving because of concerns about the virus.

Some authorities have called for modifications to holiday traditions.

	<p>Michigan health officials issued a holiday mask advisory on Friday — recommending that people wear a mask at indoor gatherings regardless of their vaccination status — to blunt both Covid-19 and a rising flu outbreak. Vermont officials suggested that unvaccinated children wear a mask if celebrating with their grandparents. And in New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul, while acknowledging that “no one wants to hear this again,” suggested that people avoid indoor spaces and large gatherings to curb transmission.</p> <p>“We all went through this anxiety a year ago,” said Ms. Hochul, a Democrat, whose state has seen new cases increase more than 50 percent in the last two weeks. “We thought that was the last time. We declared, ‘By this time next year, I’m sure we’ll be fine. We’ll have that vaccine.’ And because there are still holdouts, we cannot declare that it’s going to be completely safe.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Europe: crackdowns, protests intensify
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/22/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#as-covid-sweeps-europe-again-crackdowns-and-protests-intensify
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — European governments are toughening their measures against Covid in the face of soaring infection rates and popular resistance, with violent protests over the weekend in numerous countries.</p> <p>Austria went into lockdown on Monday to try to break the fourth wave of Covid spreading across Europe, while the German health minister, Jens Spahn, warned that by the end of this winter, “just about everyone in Germany will probably be either vaccinated, recovered or dead.”</p> <p>Tens of thousands of people protested official crackdowns and vaccine requirements in Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Switzerland and Croatia, with scattered violence and police use of tear gas and water cannons. Some protesters were organized by far-right parties, but many were simply fed up with almost two years of intermittent state controls over their lives in the name of public health.</p> <p>Europe has accounted for more than half the world’s reported Covid deaths this month, according to the World Health Organization. On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised Americans not to travel to Germany or Denmark because of the rising case rates there.</p> <p>Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany told her Christian Democratic Party on Monday that the latest surge was worse than anything Germany had suffered so far. And neighboring Austria began its fourth lockdown, one of the few in Western Europe since vaccines became widely available.</p> <p>Most stores, restaurants, sporting venues and cultural institutions shut down, leaving the streets cold and quiet in the weeks before Christmas. The lockdown, which allows people to leave home only to go to work or to procure groceries or medicines, will last at least 10 days and as many as 20.</p> <p>Austria has also announced that vaccination will be compulsory as of Feb. 1 — the first Western country to take that step, and one of only a handful around the world. On Saturday, some 40,000 Austrians marched in Vienna to protest the new measures.</p> <p>In France, President Emmanuel Macron has relied more on persuasion. Proof of vaccination or a recent negative test is required to patronize restaurants and cinemas, which has encouraged many reluctant French to get vaccinated without a national mandate. But anti-vaccination groups remain active in France, as well.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Car ramming incidents ‘more common’
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/suv-crash-into-wisconsin-christmas-parade-is-latest-among-deadly-car-ramming-incidents/ar-AAR0dB2?ocid=uxbndlbing
GIST	Police say that the driver of an SUV that plowed through a Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wis. Sunday, killing five people and wounding 48, did not appear to know anybody in the parade.

At a news conference Monday afternoon, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said police are “confident” that the suspect, identified as Darrell E. Brooks Jr., 39, acted alone, and there is “no evidence this is a terrorist incident.”

Car-ramming incidents have become all too familiar in the United States and around the world.

They have an explicit endorsement from the Islamic State, for instance, as they are relatively simple and inexpensive to carry out — but can cause great harm if done in very crowded areas. They are also becoming a more prominent tool in attacks against protesters by far-right or far-left groups.

One of the most well-known such incidents occurred in 2017, when avowed neo-Nazi James A. Fields Jr. rammed his car into a crowd of counterprotesters at a white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville, killing one person and injuring 35 others.

In a June 2021 report, the Counter Extremism Project, a nonpartisan research and advocacy group based in New York, said attacks against protesters using cars are most often the domain of the far-right, although “some were also perpetrated by those on the left against right-wing protesters.”

“Authorities recorded at least 50 vehicular rammings against protesters between May and June 2020,” it said, including at least 18 “deliberate attacks.”

There are other reasons, too, that led to deadly crashes into packed areas — a man was convicted of capital murder in 2015 after he ran his car through crowds in Austin, killing four people while intoxicated and attempting to evade a police checkpoint the year before.

CEP tallied “at least 57 vehicular terrorist attacks since 2006, collectively resulting in the deaths of at least 207 people and the injury of at least 1,133 others.” It said these types of attacks are not new but have become more common “in large part” due to “ISIS’s explicit calls to employ cars as weapons.”

Some high-profile examples include a man who was alleged to have killed eight people and injured at least a dozen when he reportedly drove a truck into pedestrians and cyclists on a Lower Manhattan bike path in 2017. Federal officials charged him with providing support to a terrorist organization, alleging that he was inspired by the Islamic State.

In 2016, an Ohio State student drove a Honda sedan through a crowd on campus, injuring 13 people, before emerging from the vehicle and slashing at a police officer and others with a butcher knife. While his motives were not clear, his social media posts indicate he was frustrated with what he perceived as injustices committed against Muslims around the world.

There are international examples, too: In July 2016, a terrorist in Nice drove a truck into a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in the French Riviera, killing 86. In December of that year, a man rammed a vehicle into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12.

In March 2017, a man plowed a vehicle into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in London, leaving four dead and 50 injured. And in 2018, a man used a rental van to run over pedestrians on a street in Toronto, killing 10 and severely injuring 16 people.

“Terrorists rely on a lot of people watching — it can be even better than having a lot of people dead,” Frank Foley, a scholar of terrorism at the Department of War Studies at King’s College London, told The Post in 2017 after the Westminster Bridge attack.

The challenges of mitigating such attacks — which are often enacted by lone-wolf attackers — using tools most people use in their everyday lives have preoccupied law enforcement for years.

“How do you stop someone driving down the street who just decides to drive their car into pedestrians?” Steve Hewitt, who studies surveillance and counterterrorism at the University of Birmingham, asked in 2017.

The answer to that question has become increasingly vital in the past few years, as terrorists have begun to shift tactics. In the past, the focus was on large-scale, spectacular attacks that involved scores of people and meticulous training.

More recently though, groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda have called for more spontaneous acts of terrorism by any means necessary. And these groups have highlighted the potential of automobiles not as car bombs, packed with detectable explosives, but as unpredictable ramming weapons.

The Department of Homeland Security has issued a guide for those seeking to mitigate the risks of vehicle attacks.

The agency recommends making it clear where entry and exit points, first-aid stations and shelter locations are situated; assigning pedestrian-only zones and implementing strategies to slow the speed of traffic around them; using various kinds of vehicle barriers “to increase standoff distances between large crowds and vehicles”; and ensuring that staff working the area have been properly trained, while “recently terminated employees” have been vetted “to determine whether they pose a security risk.”

Those caught in such an attack should immediately “run to the nearest safe area while moving away from” the car, the agency says, or if that is not possible, “curl into a protected position and try to get up as soon as possible to avoid being trampled.”

“If no rapid escape is possible, seek cover behind any available natural or artificial objects that eliminate direct line of sight from the source of hazard,” Homeland Security recommends. Call 911 and “remain alert for potential secondary attacks,” while helping others and waiting for law enforcement to arrive.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Vaccines wane against infections
SOURCE	https://news.bloombergtax.com/coronavirus/vaccines-ward-off-severe-covid-in-u-s-wane-against-infections
GIST	<p>Covid-19 vaccines remain highly effective at keeping people alive and out of the hospital, but new U.S. data add further support to the argument that the shots aren’t preventing infections as much as they once did.</p> <p>Unvaccinated people were about five times more likely to test positive for the virus than the unvaccinated in the week starting Sept. 26, down from about 15 times less likely in May, according to the latest age-adjusted data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which were updated Monday.</p> <p>The new figures come shortly after the CDC approved booster shots for all adults, and could provide additional support for third doses as the U.S. heads into its traditional winter virus season. Covid-19 cases are rising across many parts of the U.S., including the Midwest and Northeast.</p> <p>The CDC data isn’t adjusted for time since vaccination. That means that the earliest recipients of the vaccine -- mostly senior citizens and those with pre-existing conditions -- are possibly at even greater risk.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 CDC: Germany, Denmark ‘very high risk’
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/cdc-very-high-risk-travel-destinations-november-22/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) — Germany and Denmark were added to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's list of "very high" risk travel destinations on Monday as a winter Covid-19 surge sweeps much of Europe.</p> <p>Germany is battling a fourth wave and reported a record single-day surge in cases last week.</p>

Some of the charming Christmas markets that typically draw crowds in Germany this time of year have already been canceled, including the popular [Christmas market in Munich](#).

After lifting domestic Covid restrictions in September, Denmark is once again fighting a spike in Covid cases and is weighing renewed restrictions. In Copenhagen, the famed Tivoli Gardens opened its Christmas season on Friday.

Destinations that fall into the CDC's "Covid-19 Very High" Level 4 category have had more than 500 cases per 100,000 residents in the past 28 days.

People should avoid traveling to locations designated with a "Level 4" notice, the CDC recommends. Anyone who must travel should be fully vaccinated first, the agency advises.

To recap, these two destinations moved to Level 4 on November 22:

- **Denmark**
- **Germany**

Previously, the two destinations had been listed in the Level 3 category of "Covid-19 High" risk. By moving to Level 4, they join the ranks of other travel favorites in Europe and elsewhere. They include:

- **Austria**
- **Belgium**
- **Costa Rica**
- **Czech Republic**
- **Netherlands**
- **Singapore**
- **Turkey**

In all, about 75 destinations are currently at Level 4. The United Kingdom and British Virgin Islands have been lodged at Level 4 since July 19.

New entries on Level 3

The Level 3 category -- which applies to destinations that have had between 100 and 500 cases per 100,000 residents in the past 28 days -- had five updates this week, with a big showing in the Caribbean. These five destinations moved to Level 3 on November 22:

- **Aruba**
- **Curaçao**
- **Guadeloupe**
- **Israel**
- **US Virgin Islands**

The move was actually good news for all five destinations, which had been at Level 4.

You can view the CDC's risk levels for global destinations on its [travel recommendations page](#).

There are other factors for travelers to consider beyond the Covid-19 incidence rates that figure prominently in the CDC's travel notices, according to CNN Medical Analyst Dr. Leana Wen.

"The transmission rates are one guidepost. Another is what precautions are required and followed in the place that you're going and then the third is what are you planning to do once you're there," said Wen, an emergency physician and professor of health policy and management at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health.

"Are you planning to visit a lot of attractions and go to indoor bars? That's very different from you're going somewhere where you're planning to lie on the beach all day and not interact with anyone else," said Wen, who is also author of a new book, "Lifelines: A Doctor's Journey in the Fight for Public Health." Most importantly, travelers should be vaccinated, she said.

Update on Level 2

The CDC moved three African countries -- Benin, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia -- down from Level 3 to the less-risky Level 2.

For the fourth new Level 2 entry, New Zealand, the situation has worsened. The nation, which moved up from Level 1, has recently moved away from its zero-Covid strategy, focusing now on vaccination efforts and living with the virus.

These destinations moved to Level 2 on November 22:

- **Benin**
- **Equatorial Guinea**
- **Ethiopia**
- **New Zealand**

Destinations carrying the "Level 2: Covid-19 Moderate" designation have seen 50 to 99 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 residents in the past 28 days.

Keep in mind the CDC list updates weekly, and the situation in any country can change for better or worse from week to week.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Black armed militias gather Ga. courthouse
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/ahmaud-arbery-case-black-armed-militias-gather-georgia-courthouse
GIST	<p>Black armed militias rallied outside the Georgia courthouse Monday where three White men are on trial for the fatal shooting of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed Black man – and a New Black Panther leader issued a warning.</p> <p>"Ya'll are in serious trouble because the wrath of karma is coming on America," said a man who identified himself as the supreme commander of the New Black Panther militia. "We're not taking it no more."</p> <p>As prosecutors and defense lawyers delivered their closing statements, dozens of members of BLM 757, Lion of Judah Armed Forces and the New Black Panther Party marched outside the Glynn County Courthouse.</p> <p>The Southern Poverty Law Center has called the New Black Panther Party a "virulently racist and antisemitic organization whose leaders have encouraged violence against Whites, Jews and law enforcement."</p> <p>Travis McMichael, 35; his father, Greg McMichael, 65; and William "Roddie" Bryan are on trial for murder, aggravated assault and false imprisonment for the slaying of Arbery in Satilla Shores outside Brunswick, Georgia.</p> <p>The activists carried New Black Panther flags and wheeled a coffin with a dummy corpse on which was written countless names of Blacks who were killed at the hands of Whites – including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, an Instagram video shows.</p> <p>"We're standing in solidarity with the family of Ahmaud Arbery and for all those black lives that have been lost," said one of the rally's organizers, BLM 757 President Japharii Jones.</p> <p>"The message is we won't tolerate Black and Browns being murdered anymore, and we will pull up anywhere in the nation," he told Fox News.</p> <p>He said the groups have a shared goal of self defense for Black people.</p>

"Our longterm plan is to arm our entire community with responsible gun ownership," he said. "We will be holding classes in the future and we will be setting up workshops in all 50 states."

When asked how the groups would respond to a not-guilty verdict, Jones replied, "No comment."

In closing statements, prosecutor Lind Dunikoski argued that the defendants pursued Arbery in pickup trucks for five minutes through the neighborhood Feb. 23, 2020, and shot him because he was a Black man who refused to talk to them.

The defense told jurors that the McMichaels suspected Arbery of having committed a crime and were trying to detain him until police arrived.

Travis McMichael opened fire only after Arbery attacked him and grabbed his shotgun, he testified last week.

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HEADLINE	11/22 inflation: rise in costs for food, fuel
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inflation-rate-prices-gas-food/
GIST	<p>Americans are paying higher prices this year than in roughly three decades. Inflation surged 6.2% in October, paced by steep increases in heating fuel, gasoline and food, labor data showed last week.</p> <p>As inflation rises, here's a closer look at the rise in costs for two major household expenses — food and fuel — that have spiked compared with a year ago.</p> <p>Fuel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fuel oil — up 60% to average of \$3.42 per gallon• Gasoline (unleaded regular) — up 57% to average of \$3.48 per gallon• Diesel fuel — up 44% to \$3.55 per gallon <p>Meat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncooked beef — up average of 15% to \$5.24 per pound• Boneless chuck roast — USDA choice up 29% to \$7.40 per pound• Ground beef — up 18% to \$4.72 per pound• Bacon (sliced) — up 28% to \$7.32 per pound• Chicken breast (boneless) — up 9.1% to \$3.59 per pound• Fresh whole chicken — down 3.6% to \$1.52 per pound <p>Dairy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eggs (grade A large) — up 29% to \$1.82 per dozen• Whole milk — up 8.4% to \$3.66 per gallon• American processed cheese — down 5.8% to \$3.99 per pound• Natural cheddar cheese — down 3.3% to \$5.34 per pound <p>Beverages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ground coffee — up 6.1% to average of \$4.80 per pound• Malt beverages (16 ounces) — up 4% to \$1.55• Wine (red or white) — up 3.2% to \$12.94 per liter• Orange juice (frozen concentrate, 12 ounces) — up 14% to \$2.63 <p>Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potato chips (16 ounces) — up 4.6% to \$5.27• Chocolate chip cookies — down 0.9% to \$3.82 per pound <p>Other staples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• White sugar — up 13% to average of 71 cents per pound

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White rice — up 2.9% to 79 cents per pound • White bread — up 1.5% to \$1.53 per pound • Whole wheat bread — up 0.2% to \$2.18 per pound • White flour — down 12% to 40 cents per pound • Spaghetti and macaroni — down 13% to \$1.07 per pound
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HEADLINE	11/22 Thanksgiving: inflation, supply chain issues
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/inflation-supply-chain-issues-add-americans-struggles-thanksgiving/story?id=81299251
GIST	<p>With inflation driving up costs and Thanksgiving right around the corner, Americans across the country are feeling the effects.</p> <p>Kansas City mother of four Talitha McFadden James said she used to be able to buy all the groceries she and her family of six needed on a \$100/week budget.</p> <p>But during a recent trip to the grocery store, James told "This Week" co-anchor Martha Raddatz that since prices started to rise, that hasn't been the case.</p> <p>James recalled the shock she felt when her grocery bill hit \$500.</p> <p>"I literally had to reevaluate and start taking stuff off at the scanner belt," James said. "It's embarrassing."</p> <p>"But at the same time," she added, "I know what I can afford and that's not it."</p> <p>Inflation is at a three-decade high. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, consumer prices have risen by 6.2% over the past year.</p> <p>The price of fish, meat and poultry has gone up 11.9% on average over the last year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. James said that at her local grocery store, a roll of ground beef that was once \$18.67 is now \$30.83.</p> <p>According to report by the American Farm Bureau Federation, the average price of a 16-pound turkey increased 24% since last year. James said the price hike is too much for her and her family, and they won't be eating a turkey this Thanksgiving.</p> <p>Some families who haven't been able to afford food have had to rely on community pantries. Operation Breakthrough, a non-profit in Kansas City that offers childcare for families who live in poverty, is offering parents a reprieve for the holidays.</p> <p>Mary Esselman, the CEO of Operation Breakthrough, said that the organization's community pantry plans to give out about 600 turkeys to families in need.</p> <p>But, according to Esselman, supply chain issues almost cut their turkey supply in half. At the last minute, one of Operation Breakthrough's food providers was able to supply the missing turkeys.</p> <p>"Everyone deserves to have Thanksgiving," Esselman said.</p> <p>The organization assists families that have an average income of \$12,000 per year by providing early education programs, pediatric health care and even children's clothing. And with the rising inflation rate, Esselman said there's been an uptick in parents coming to the pantry for groceries.</p> <p>Since many parents who use the pantry rely on it and on the meals their children are provided at school, the holidays will be especially tough.</p>

"We go into the holidays -- most schools are out next week," Esselman said. "So you've got kids that typically would be in school having breakfast and lunch now are going to be home. And that's where we're seeing families coming in to see, how can I get ready for this holiday?"

Further up the supply chain, small farm owners have been seeing the effects of inflation as well.

Katie Nixon, who owns Greengate Family Farm in Wheatland, Missouri, said the coronavirus pandemic brought her and her family more business.

"Customers have flocked to us and we have sold most of what we can grow," Nixon said. "We're actually expanding."

However, expansions on the farm had to be postponed. Plans to buy a new high tunnel to grow more produce, which Nixon described as an "unheated greenhouse," were put on hold until winter due to supply chain issues.

Nixon said the high tunnel that was supposed to be built this past spring ended up being "a third more expensive," due to rising inflation rates. A lack of supplies because of supply chain breaks caused a waiting list for the high tunnel that, according to Nixon, was 300 names long. She wasn't able to get on to it.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused infrastructure issues, which led to supply chain issues and a rise in inflation.

Despite Nixon's farm selling their products at cost, they were forced to raise their prices for the first time in a decade. She said her farm is also in "desperate need" of a new pickup truck and a van -- and also help around the farm -- but those needs have become other projects to put on hold.

The White House has pointed to President Joe Biden's long-awaited infrastructure bills as a way to help with inflation, though opponents of the bills say it will increase it.

Biden signed his \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill into law last week, just as he got his \$2 trillion social spending bill through the House of Representatives.

According to the White House, the Build Back Better Act lowers costs on prescription drugs, health care and housing, provides universal pre-kindergarten for every 3- and 4-year old in the country and extends the child tax credit.

"What they're talking about doing now with this next massive tax and spending spree is going to aggravate and accelerate this inflation issue even more," Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said during a press conference held by Republican senators on Wednesday.

Biden, however, was singing a different tune during his visit to Baltimore's port in early November, pointing to a letter he received from 17 Nobel laureates on economics who asserted that his Build Back Better plan will "bring inflation down, not up."

Last week, Vice President Kamala Harris acknowledged during an interview with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos on "Good Morning America" that inflation is "real" and "rough." But she said it is one her and Biden's "highest priorities." Harris explained the long-term solution is to "bring down the cost of living" and that the Build Back Better plan will do so with lower-cost child care, among other subsidies.

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HEADLINE	11/23 China targets celebrities' online info
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-will-more-tightly-regulate-celebrities-online-information-2021-11-23/
GIST	<p>SHANGHAI, Nov 23 (Reuters) - China's cyberspace regulator said on Tuesday it will tighten oversight over how celebrity information is disseminated online, such as the publishing of their personal details and the placements of their advertisements on internet sites.</p> <p>The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said this was aimed at creating a positive and healthy internet environment, describing the proliferation of gossip and star-chasing as impacting mainstream values.</p> <p>It said it would create a "negative list" that would target online celebrity information that promoted bad values such as ostentatious wealth as well as any attempts to encourage fans to spend money to support celebrities.</p> <p>Celebrity endorsements and advertisements should be clearly marked out by platforms, the CAC said, and fan clubs must be managed by authorized agents.</p> <p>Chinese authorities in recent months have moved to dampen what they have called the country's "chaotic" celebrity fan culture, ordering broadcasters, online platforms and artists to help curb the phenomenon after a series of celebrity scandals involving tax evasion and sexual assault.</p> <p>Online celebrity fan clubs had become a widespread phenomenon in China with local newspaper The Paper projecting the country's "idol economy" could be worth 140 billion yuan (\$22 billion) by 2022. But they have also been criticised for their influence over minors and for causing social disorder.</p> <p>When Canadian-Chinese pop star Kris Wu was detained by Beijing police in July on suspicion of sexual assault, his fan groups come to his defence on social media. Most of these fan accounts, along with Wu's online accounts, were later shut down.</p> <p>Chinese authorities have also ordered actors and other performers to follow moral guidelines or face being banned.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the China Association of Performing Arts published a list of 88 people it said were banned from livestreaming for reasons including violating ethics, which included Wu.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Brazil exposed in Wi-Fi software firm leak
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/millions-of-brazilians-exposed-in-wi-fi-management-software-firm-leak/
GIST	<p>A Brazilian Wi-Fi management software firm exposed data of various high profile companies and millions of their customers.</p> <p>The data was leaked by WSpot, which provides software that enables businesses to secure their on-premise Wi-Fi networks and allow password-free online access to their customers.</p> <p>The leak was discovered by security research firm SafetyDetectives. The researchers found WSpot's misconfigured Amazon Web Services (AWS) S3 bucket, which was left open and exposed 10GB worth of data to the public. After discovering the sensitive data on September 2, the researchers contacted the software firm on September 7. WSpot secured the breach the following day.</p> <p>Some 226,000 files were exposed in the leak, the researchers noted, including personal information from approximately 2.5 million individuals who connected to the public Wi-Fi networks provided by WSpot clients. The company's client portfolio includes Pizza Hut, financial services provider Sicredi, and healthcare firm Unimed.</p>

Return to Top	<p>According to SafetyDetectives, the set of information exposed included details supplied by individuals in order to access the Wi-Fi service provided by the companies. This includes full name, email address, full address, and taxpayer registration numbers -- in addition to the login credentials created in the registration process.</p> <p>WSpot confirmed the leak to <i>ZDNet</i>, saying the issue was caused by a "lack of standardization in the management of information [stored] in a specific folder." The Brazilian company reiterated that it has been working to address the issue since it was contacted about it until the conclusion of technical procedures on November 18.</p> <p>WSpot states that its servers remain intact and were not invaded by malicious actors, saying there's no evidence that the exposed data has been accessed by cybercriminals. However, the software firm also stated that it has hired a security company to fully investigate any repercussions in relation to the data leaked in the incident.</p> <p>WSpot says the issue impacted 5% of its total customer base, and none of its clients had business and/or sensitive information compromised. Additionally, it reiterated that it does not capture financial information such as credit card details or access credentials to other services.</p> <p>It's unclear whether the company will inform the individuals exposed about the incident.</p> <p>According to a WSpot spokesperson, the National Data Protection Authority has not yet been contacted about the incident, however, "all legal issues surrounding the case are being addressed by WSpot as thoroughly as possible, especially in order to ascertain the next steps."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Arrest: 'ransom your employer' scheme
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/suspect-arrested-in-ransom-your-employer-criminal-scheme/
GIST	<p>A Nigerian man has been arrested in connection to a scheme attempting to lure insiders to deploy ransomware on employer systems.</p> <p>On November 22, security expert Brian Krebs reported that the man, Oluwaseun Medayedupin, was arrested by Nigerian authorities on Friday.</p> <p>The suspect is allegedly linked to a 'ransom your employer' scheme investigated by Abnormal Security in August.</p> <p>Customers of the cybersecurity firm were sent emails with the subject "Partnership affiliate offer," requesting that the recipient considered becoming an accomplice in a cyberattack.</p> <p>The emails offered a 40% cut of an anticipated \$2.5 million ransomware payment in Bitcoin (BTC), made after the recipients installed the DemonWare ransomware on their employer's systems.</p> <p>A Microsoft Outlook email address and Telegram handle were provided for interested parties. Abnormal Security researchers reached out under the guise of a fictional person and confirmed they were sent a ransomware executable hosted on two file-sharing websites.</p> <p>However, the ransomware 'cut' on offer was reduced to between \$120,000 -- \$250,000 once the team began communicating with the scheme's operator.</p> <p>The team suspected the ransomware initiative may be of Nigerian origin. When queried, the threat actor said he was attempting to build a social network for Africa called Sociogram and shared his LinkedIn profile containing his full name.</p>

	<p>"According to the actor, he collects his targeting information from LinkedIn, which, in addition to other commercial services that sell access to similar data, is a common method scammers use to obtain contact information for employees," Abnormal Security said. "[...] he had originally intended to send his targets -- all senior-level executives -- phishing emails to compromise their accounts, but after that was unsuccessful, he pivoted to this ransomware pretext."</p> <p>Medayedupin then reached out to Krebs following his report, asking that the name Sociogram be removed, but at the same time, neither confirming nor denying Abnormal Security's investigation. Another message followed via a domain registrar, calling "Mr. Krebson" a "clout chasing monger."</p> <p>Charges are expected to be brought against Medayedupin, reportedly 23 years of age, this week.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Linux malware targets e-commerce servers
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/cybercrime/malicious-golang-program-attacks-e-commerce-servers
GIST	<p>Just in time for the holidays, researchers late last week discovered a new malicious Linux agent — "linux_avp" — that hides as a system process on e-commerce servers. The malware, a malicious Golang program, serves as a backdoor and has been deployed around the world since last week, taking its commands from a control server in Beijing.</p> <p>Researchers at Sansec explained that the attacker starts with automated e-commerce attack probes, testing for dozens of weaknesses in common online store platforms. After roughly 36 hours, the attacker finds a file upload vulnerability in one of the store's plugins. They then upload a web shell and modify the server code to intercept customer data.</p> <p>Sansec researchers said they learned of the attack through a merchant who had reached out to them after hiring two forensic companies, but still having malware on his store's systems.</p> <p>This "linux_avp" malware serves as another example on how all of our systems, especially those involved with e-commerce, are being scanned for vulnerabilities, said Garret Grajek, CEO of YouAttest. Grajek said this particular piece of malware gets inserted into systems and then behaves as an advanced persistent threat (APT) tool to communicate back to a control mechanism, conducting activities to ensure it does not become detected, such as hiding its process name.</p> <p>"Enterprises must be proactive in watching out for the activities that malware will be conducting — such as navigating through our systems, looking for valuable resources, escalating privileges on the accounts, and communicating back to their command and control base stations," Grajek said. "Tools that identify and trigger on identity privilege changes are key to help identify malicious attack mechanisms like this "linux_avp" malware."</p> <p>Casey Ellis, co-founder and CTO at Bugcrowd, said the malware takes advantage of the Achilles heel of e-commerce websites: File upload vulnerabilities. While it isn't a new tactic to implant web shells on these types of systems, Ellis said the attackers have gone to some trouble to maintain persistence if the shell is discovered (the obfuscated crontab entry), as well as hiding their tracks (the benignly named data directories).</p> <p>"Linux operators still often feel a little more bulletproof on the internet than Windows and Mac operators, and this is another demonstration that all code is flawed, and ultimately staying ahead of risk exposure through testing and updates is critical for anyone who operates an online business," Ellis said.</p> <p>Saryu Nayyar, CEO at Gurukul, said attackers are using this Linux malware to upload payloads that have the ability to steal user information for e-commerce sites.</p> <p>"If an attack is possible, someone will find a way to exploit it and use it for their own benefit," Nayyar said. "E-commerce sites seem to be especially targeted during the holiday season, so it's incumbent on</p>

	these sites to monitor and search out potential attacks. And users should be checking their payment accounts regularly to make sure that their information isn't being used to make illicit purchases."
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HEADLINE	11/22 Vulnerabilities in Philips medical products
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/philips-working-patches-vulnerabilities-found-medical-products
GIST	<p>Philips is working on patches for several vulnerabilities discovered by researchers in some of the company's medical products.</p> <p>The flaws were identified by researchers at industrial cybersecurity firm Nozomi Networks in Philips IntelliBridge, Patient Information Center iX (PIC iX), and Efficia CM series products. Advisories for the vulnerabilities were published last week by Philips and the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).</p> <p>One advisory describes two high-severity vulnerabilities found in IntelliBridge EC 40 and EC 80 Hub patient monitoring systems, which integrate point-of-care devices with hospital information systems. The flaws are related to the use of hardcoded credentials and authentication bypass.</p> <p>"Successful exploitation of these issues may allow an attacker unauthorized access to the Philips IntelliBridge EC40/80 hub and may allow access to execute software, modify device configuration, or view/update files, including unidentifiable patient data," Philips said in its advisory. "The vulnerabilities can potentially be exploited over the Philips patient monitoring network, which is required to be physically or logically isolated from the hospital local area network (LAN)."</p> <p>In the PIC iX patient monitoring system and the Efficia CM series patient monitors, Nozomi researchers discovered three medium-severity issues related to improper input validation, the use of weak cryptographic algorithms, and the use of hardcoded cryptographic keys.</p> <p>"Successful exploitation of these vulnerabilities may allow an attacker unauthorized access to data (including patient data) and denial of service resulting in temporary interruption of viewing of physiological data at the central station. Exploitation does not enable modification or change to point of care devices," Philips said.</p> <p>Philips has only released patches for one of the vulnerabilities affecting PIC iX. For the remaining issues, the electronics giant expects to provide fixes by the end of 2021 and the end of 2022. In the meantime, the vendor has shared recommendations for reducing the risk of exploitation.</p> <p>Ivan Speziale, senior security researcher at Nozomi Networks, has shared the following information with <i>SecurityWeek</i> regarding the vulnerabilities and the impacted products:</p> <p><i>"In a typical deployment you have a patient monitor that sends data to a Philips PIC iX which acts as a collector, plus can be used to manage/view patient data (there's a lot of material on Philips website)</i></p> <p><i>For those cases where the patient monitor is not made by Philips, but by other vendors, Philips sells IntelliBridge, which is a device that converts the data from third party patient monitor into a format that is ingestible by PIC iX</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• CVE-2021-43548 is a remote DOS affecting PIC iX, where a network attacker can cause PIC iX to reboot and thus lose any data sent by a patient monitor</i> <i>• CVE-2021-43552 concerns the format of the backups of patient data produced by PIC iX, essentially they're encrypted with an hardcoded key</i> <i>• CVE-2021-43550 concerns the encryption algorithm used by Philips Efficia CM patient monitors, essentially the patient data sent over the network are encrypted with the serial of the device, which should also be sent in clear over the network</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>CVE-2021-32993 and CVE-2021-33017 instead affect the web management interface of Intellibridge EC40/80 devices which can be compromised (there's also a third vuln affecting this device that should be published at some point) "</i> <p>Philips pointed out in its advisories that there is no evidence of malicious exploitation or any other incidents caused by these vulnerabilities. In the case of the IntelliBridge hubs, the company says it's "unlikely that this potential vulnerability would impact clinical use."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Online payment fraud surges by 208%
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/online-payment-fraud-black-friday/
GIST	<p>Online payment fraud surged by 208% between September and October 2021, indicating that scammers are ramping up attacks on online shoppers in the build-up to this year's Black Friday.</p> <p>In a new report, cybersecurity vendor Kaspersky discovered 1,935,905 financial phishing attacks disguised as e-payment systems in October 2021. This is more than double the 627,560 attacks detected in the previous month.</p> <p>Interestingly, the researchers didn't observe any seasonal trends for other types of phishing related to online shopping in the first 10 months of 2021. The emphasis on e-payment systems is believed to be linked to the introduction of new payment systems in many countries this year following the shift to online shopping during COVID-19.</p> <p>The team also detected 221,745 spam emails containing the words 'Black Friday' from October 27 to November 19, providing further evidence that fraudsters are trying to take advantage of the biggest shopping day of the year.</p> <p>In total, Kaspersky reported seeing 40 million phishing attacks targeting e-commerce and e-shopping platforms from January to October 2021.</p> <p>Of the online shopping platforms, Amazon was consistently the most popular phishing lure used by scammers. Next was eBay, followed by Alibaba and Mercado Libre.</p> <p>Tatyana Shcherbakova, security expert at Kaspersky, commented: "We always witness intensified scamming activity amid the Black Friday season. Perhaps a bit more unexpected is the attention being paid to e-payment systems. This time, we discovered a huge increase of 208% in the number of attacks mimicking the most popular payment systems. Of course, every new payment application is seen by scammers as a new opportunity to potentially exploit users.</p> <p>"So, in order to protect your data and finances, it will be a safe practice to make sure the online payment page is secure: you'll know it is if the web page's URL begins with HTTPS instead of the usual HTTP and an icon of a lock will also typically appear beside the URL."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Cisco flaw affects firewalls
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cisco-flaw-affects-firewalls/
GIST	<p>A newly discovered vulnerability found in two devices made by Cisco could cause remote access to be disrupted.</p> <p>The flaw – CVE-2021-34704 – was detected by Positive Technologies researcher Nikita Abramov in October in the firewalls of Cisco ASA (Adaptive Security Appliance) and Cisco FTD (Firepower Threat Defense).</p>

If the vulnerability is exploited, the organization's firewall will be weakened, leaving it more vulnerable to attack, and employees who are working remotely would be blocked from accessing their organization's internal network.

According to Abramov, an attacker does not require elevated privileges or special access to exploit the flaw. All it takes is the formation of a simple request, in which one of the parts is of a different size than that expected by the device.

Further parsing of the request will trigger a buffer overflow/overflow as the amount of data in the buffer exceeds its storage capacity. The impacted system will then shut down abruptly and restart.

Abramov said: "If hackers disrupt the operation of Cisco ASA and Cisco FTD, a company will be left without a firewall and remote access (VPN). If the attack is successful, remote employees or partners will not be able to access the internal network of the organization, and access from the outside will be restricted. At the same time, firewall failure will reduce the protection of the company."

Describing the impact such an outcome could have on an organization. Abramov said: "All this can negatively impact company processes, disrupt interactions between departments, and make the company vulnerable to targeted attacks."

According to Forrester Research, Cisco is an enterprise firewall market leader that has deployed more than 1 million security appliances around the globe.

An assessment of the flaw determined it to be of high severity with a CVSSv3.0 score of 8.6. A fix for the flaw has been created and users are advised to follow the manufacturer's recommendations outlined in its [security advisory](#) and install updates as soon as possible.

Positive Technologies has previously discovered vulnerabilities in [Cisco Firepower Device Manager \(FDM\) On-Box](#) and critical flaws in Cisco ASA, such as [CVE-2020-3187](#), [CVE-2020-3259](#), and [CVE-2020-3452](#).

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HEADLINE	11/22 Windows zero-day: elevate privileges
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/new-windows-zero-day-with-public-exploit-lets-you-become-an-admin/
GIST	<p>A security researcher has publicly disclosed an exploit for a new Windows zero-day local privilege elevation vulnerability that gives admin privileges in Windows 10, Windows 11, and Windows Server.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has tested the exploit and used it to open to command prompt with SYSTEM privileges from an account with only low-level 'Standard' privileges.</p> <p>Using this vulnerability, threat actors with limited access to a compromised device can easily elevate their privileges to help spread laterally within the network.</p> <p>The vulnerability affects all supported versions of Windows, including Windows 10, Windows 11, and Windows Server 2022.</p> <p>Researcher releases bypass to patched vulnerability As part of the November 2021 Patch Tuesday, Microsoft fixed a 'Windows Installer Elevation of Privilege Vulnerability' vulnerability tracked as CVE-2021-41379.</p> <p>This vulnerability was discovered by security researcher Abdelhamid Naceri, who found a bypass to the patch and a more powerful new zero-day privilege elevation vulnerability after examining Microsoft's fix.</p>

Yesterday, Naceri published a working proof-of-concept exploit for the new zero-day on GitHub, explaining that it works on all supported versions of Windows.

"This variant was discovered during the analysis of CVE-2021-41379 patch. the bug was not fixed correctly, however, instead of dropping the bypass," explains Naceri in his writeup. "I have chosen to actually drop this variant as it is more powerful than the original one."

Furthermore, Naceri explained that while it is possible to configure group policies to prevent 'Standard' users from performing MSI installer operations, his zero-day bypasses this policy and will work anyway.

BleepingComputer tested Naceri's 'InstallerFileTakeOver' exploit, and it only took a few seconds to gain SYSTEM privileges from a test account with 'Standard' privileges...

The test was performed on a fully up-to-date Windows 10 21H1 build 19043.1348 install.

When BleepingComputer asked Naceri why he publicly disclosed the zero-day vulnerability, we were told he did it out of frustration over Microsoft's decreasing payouts in their bug bounty program.

"Microsoft bounties has been trashed since April 2020, I really wouldn't do that if MSFT didn't take the decision to downgrade those bounties," explained Naceri.

Naceri is not alone in his concerns about what researchers feel is the reduction in bug bounty awards.

BleepingComputer has reached out to Microsoft about the disclosed zero-day and will update the article if we receive a reply.

As is typical with zero days, Microsoft will likely fix the vulnerability in a future Patch Tuesday update.

However, Naceri warned that it is not advised to try and fix the vulnerability by attempting to patch the binary as it will likely break the installer.

"The best workaround available at the time of writing this is to wait Microsoft to release a security patch, due to the complexity of this vulnerability," explained Naceri.

"Any attempt to patch the binary directly will break windows installer. So you better wait and see how Microsoft will screw the patch again."

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HEADLINE	11/22 Critical infrastructure alert holiday threats
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/cisa-urges-critical-infrastructure-to-be-alert-for-holiday-threats
GIST	<p>As Americans across the country get ready for turkey and travel this Thanksgiving, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the FBI issued a warning to all organizations, but especially critical infrastructure, about security threats they might face during the holiday season.</p> <p>"Recent history tells us that this could be a time when these persistent cyber actors halfway across the world are looking for ways — big and small — to disrupt the critical networks and systems belonging to organizations, businesses, and critical infrastructure," officials wrote in a statement.</p> <p>While they have not identified any specific threats, officials noted this year's trends show attackers have chosen holidays and weekends, such as Independence Day and Mother's Day weekends, to launch serious ransomware campaigns. They urge organizations to examine their security posture and adopt best practices to manage their risk.</p> <p>The recommendations include identifying IT security employees who would be available to work during weekends and holidays in the event a cyberattack occurs. They also advise implementing multifactor</p>

	<p>authentication for remote access and admin accounts; mandating strong passwords and ensuring they aren't reused across multiple accounts; and ensuring potentially risky services such as Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) are secure and monitored.</p> <p>Officials also advise reviewing incident response and communication plans, and updating them if necessary, to reduce potential business impact if an incident occurs.</p>
Return to Top	Read the full release for more details.

HEADLINE	11/22 GoDaddy suffers large data breach
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/godaddy-breach-exposes-ssl-keys-of-managed-wordpress-hosting-customers
GIST	<p>A data breach at GoDaddy exposed SSL keys issued to an undisclosed — but likely large — number of active customers using its Managed WordPress website hosting service. The incident has sparked concerns about attackers hijacking domains for ransomware or spoofing them for credential theft and other malicious purposes.</p> <p>GoDaddy, a major domain registrar and website hosting company, on Monday announced it had discovered a data breach on Nov. 17 that exposed data belonging to a total of 1.2 million active and inactive customers of Managed WordPress. Exposed data included the email address and customer number associated with the WordPress accounts; the default WordPress admin password that was set when the account was first provisioned; and SFTP and database username and passwords. SSL keys belonging to a subset of the 1.2 million affected customers also were exposed, GoDaddy said in a regulatory statement filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission.</p> <p>The publicly listed company said it had reset all affected passwords and was in the process of issuing and implementing new certificates for customers whose SSL keys were exposed.</p> <p>GoDaddy officials say the attackers used a compromised password to access the certificate provisioning system in GoDaddy's legacy code base for Managed WordPress. An investigation showed the attackers gained initial access to its environment on Sept. 6 and remained undetected for more than 70 days, until Nov. 17.</p> <p>"We are sincerely sorry for this incident and the concern it causes for our customers," GoDaddy's chief information security officer, Demetrius Comes, said in the statement filed with the SEC. "We will learn from this incident and are already taking steps to strengthen our provisioning system with additional layers of protection."</p> <p>It's unclear how that reassurance will resonate with customers given GoDaddy's struggles with security over the past couple of years. In May 2020, the company said it discovered a breach affecting SSH credentials belonging to some 28,000 customers. The breach occurred in November 2019 but wasn't discovered until April of the following year. On at least two other occasions last year, employees at the company provided scammers with control of domains belonging to a handful of customers as the result of social engineering.</p> <p>Potential for Future Problems</p> <p>The big concern with its latest breach is the potential for attackers to use the SSL credentials to impersonate domains belonging to legitimate companies for the purpose of credential theft or malware distribution. Attackers also could potentially use the keys to hijack a domain name and attempt to extort a ransom for its return, security experts say.</p> <p>"Affected companies need to replace those certificates with new ones," says Nick France, CTO of SSL at Sectigo. They should ensure the original certificate is revoked and a completely new private key is generated, he adds.</p>

Certificate revocation itself is a quick process with compromised keys typically needing to be replaced between 24 hours and five days. GoDaddy is a certificate-issuing authority, and if all the exposed SSL keys were issued by the company, then it would be the one doing the revoking and reissuing.

"What has not been made clear is if all of these compromised certificates and keys were all from the GoDaddy CA, or if there are other certificates that have been compromised," France says. Many hosting companies offer their own certificates to customers but also allow customers to bring their own certificate if they choose. "Until we know what the makeup of the compromised certificates looks like — who they were for and who issued them — it's difficult to say exactly who needs to take action," he says.

Murali Palanisamy, chief solutions officer for AppViewX, says breaches like the one at GoDaddy highlight the need for organizations to have a platform that automates the certificate revocation and reissuing process. Such incidents also show why it might be a good idea for organizations to consider using short-lived digital certificates, so even if keys are compromised, the ability for attackers to misuse them is time constrained.

"Typical certificates are valid for a year," Palaniswamy says. If there was an exploit halfway through the certificate's life, the hackers would have more than six months of valid certificates.

"A short-lived certificate like LetsEncrypt is valid for 90 days and gets automatically renewed," he says. The validity period for such certificates can be reduced to just 30 days if needed, he says. "With a short-lived certificate of 30 days," he adds, "there's a shorter window of time that could be used to craft a sophisticated attack on an exploited certificate."

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HEADLINE	11/22 Cost of data breach beyond bottom line
SOURCE	https://securityintelligence.com/cost-of-data-breach-bottom-line/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>How do you measure the cost of a company data breach? You could try asking those that have been attacked. The IBM Security Cost of a Data Breach Report 2021 did just that, and the numbers reveal some hard truths.</p> <p>For example, ransomware attacks cost an average of \$4.62 million. These costs included escalation, notification, lost business and response costs. This total did not include the cost of the ransom — if it was even paid.</p> <p>The economic impact of data protection bleeds well past typical bottom-line measurements. Let's take a look at how much a data breach response really costs. Plus, we'll explore key factors that mitigate or amplify the financial damage.</p> <p>Unexpected Cost of a Data Breach</p> <p>Let's pretend a cybersecurity journalist notifies your company of a vulnerability in an image-sharing application. Let's say 800 million or so images were exposed dating back to 2003. And maybe some images contained sensitive personal data, such as social security numbers and financial information.</p> <p>Within days, your company issues a press release about the incident. You send a Form 8-K to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The breach was painful, but you're all clear with the SEC, right? Well, if the SEC determines that your IT team identified the vulnerability several months earlier and did not inform leadership, you might be in trouble.</p> <p>That's exactly what happened to First American Financial Corporation. Without admitting or denying the SEC's findings, First American agreed to a cease-and-desist order and to pay a \$487,616 penalty.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Pearson plc, a London-based company that provides educational publishing services, agreed to pay \$1 million to settle charges that it misled investors about a 2018 cyber intrusion. The breach</p>

involved the theft of millions of student records, including dates of birth and email addresses. The SEC determined that Pearson did not have adequate disclosure controls and procedures.

The Business Data Breach Cost

Of course, the bottom line takes a direct hit in every data breach. The IBM report reveals that lost business represents the largest slice of breach costs, at an average total cost of \$1.59 million.

Lost business costs included increased customer turnover, lost revenue due to system downtime and the increasing cost of acquiring new business due to diminished reputation.

Non-Business Cost of a Data Breach

The non-business elements of a data breach cost companies \$2.65 million, according to the report. That's 62.5% of the overall costs of a data breach. For the average \$4.24 million data security incident, here's the overall cost breakdown (and percentage of total costs):

- \$1.59m (38%) — Lost business costs, which include customer churn, downtime and new business acquisition costs
- \$1.24m (29%) — Detection and escalation costs, including hunting down and identifying the breach. Also includes getting key team members involved and/or any external services (forensic, legal, etc.).
- \$1.14m (27%) — Post-breach response cost to cover containment, eradication and recovery processes
- \$0.27m (6%) — Notification costs to inform regulatory agencies, partners, customers and the general public.

Zero Trust Saves \$1.76 Million

What is data security when facing a breach without zero trust? It's expensive. In the report, companies with mature zero trust saved \$1.76 million per breach compared to companies with no zero trust.

A [zero trust framework](#) considers every connection and endpoint as a threat. This provides for both external and internal threat protection. A zero trust network:

- Logs and inspects all corporate network traffic
- Limits and controls access to the network
- Verifies and secures network resources.

Compliance Failure Costs

Of 25 cost factors that either amplify or mitigate breach costs, compliance failure increases cost more than any other factor. Organizations with a high level of compliance failures (resulting in fines, penalties and lawsuits) faced an average cost of a data breach of \$5.65 million.

Meanwhile, groups with low levels of compliance failures only spent \$3.35 million. So being on the ball compliance-wise can save you \$2.3 million or 51.1%.

Time and Cost Savings From Automation

[Automation](#) helps make day-to-day tasks easier for database security teams. But how does it affect costs in the event of a data breach?

Security automation augments or replaces human-based tasks in the identification and containment of incidents or intrusion. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, analytics and automated security orchestration all come into play here. This is especially relevant in big data security and enterprise-level groups.

In the IBM study, organizations with no security automation saw average breach costs of \$6.71 million. Those with fully deployed security automation spent \$2.90 million on average, a savings of \$3.81 million. This represented the biggest cost savings in the study.

When it comes to a data breach, another key factor is time. For groups with fully deployed security AI & automation, it took an average of 184 days to identify the breach and 63 days to contain the breach (total life cycle 247 days). For those with no AI/automation deployed, it took an average of 239 days to identify the breach and 85 days to contain (total life cycle of 324 days).

In both cases, the cycle times seem too long to bear. However, without the help of AI, a breach takes an average of 77 more days to detect.

Public, Private or Hybrid Cloud?

Does the type of cloud breach make a difference in cost? It makes a big difference. Here's the breakdown:

- Public cloud breaches cost an average of \$4.80 million
- Private cloud breaches cost an average of \$4.55 million
- [Hybrid cloud](#) breaches cost an average of \$3.61 million.

So hybrid cloud breaches cost 28.3% less than incidents that occur in public cloud architectures.


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HEADLINE	11/22 Hackers exploit e-commerce software flaw
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/hackers-targeted-thousands-of-online-retailers-to-steal-credit-card-details/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Over 4,000 online retailers have been warned that their websites had been hacked by cybercriminals trying to steal customers' payment information and other personal information.</p> <p>In total, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has identified a total of 4,151 retailers that had been compromised by hackers attempting to exploit vulnerabilities on checkout pages to divert payments and steal details. They alerted the retailers to the breaches over the past 18 months.</p> <p>The majority of the online shops that cybercriminals exploited for payment-skimming attacks were compromised by known vulnerabilities in the e-commerce platform Magento. Most of those affected and alerted to the compromises and vulnerabilities are small and medium-sized businesses.</p> <p>The NCSC revealed the number of businesses it has notified about customer data being stolen ahead of Black Friday. It urges all retailers to ensure that their websites are secure ahead of the busiest online shopping period of the year to protect their business -- and their customers -- from cybercriminals.</p> <p>"We want small and medium-sized online retailers to know how to prevent their sites from being exploited by opportunistic cybercriminals over the peak shopping period," said Sarah Lyons, deputy director for economy and society at the NCSC. "Falling victim to cybercrime could leave you and your customers out of pocket and cause reputational damage."</p> <p>One of the key things that online retailers can do to help prevent payments and personal data from being stolen is to apply the available security patches that stop cybercriminals from being able to exploit known vulnerabilities in Magento and any other software they use.</p> <p>"It's important to keep websites as secure as possible, and I would urge all business owners to follow our guidance and make sure their software is up to date," said Lyons.</p> <p>Applying security patches in a timely manner is just one of the things recommended by the NCSC's and British Retail Consortium's Cyber Resilience Toolkit For Retail. This kit was released in October 2020, but the information on keeping websites secure from cyberattacks is still very much relevant today.</p> <p>"Skimming and other cybersecurity breaches are a threat to all retailers," said Graham Wynn, assistant director for consumer, competition and regulatory affairs at the British Retail Consortium.</p> <p>"The British Retail Consortium strongly urges all retailers to follow the NCSC's advice and check their preparedness for any cyber issues that could arise during the busy end-of-year period."</p>

The compromised shopping websites were identified as part of the [NCSC's Active Cyber Defence programme](#), which has been monitoring for vulnerabilities that could impact online retailers since April 2020.

The NCSC has also [reiterated advice to consumers](#) on how to stay safe when shopping online. The advice includes being selective about where you shop, only providing necessary information, ensuring the payment system used is protected and keeping online accounts secure.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Consumers act on data breach notices?
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2021/11/22/consumers-data-breach/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Only three percent of consumers implemented a credit freeze after receiving a data breach notice, 11 percent enrolled in credit/data monitoring, and only 22 percent changed all of their account passwords, a recent survey by DIG.Works on behalf of the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) has shown.</p> <p>48 percent of the respondents only changed the password on the breached account, and 16 percent took no action at all.</p> <p>Those that didn't act after receiving a breach notice offered a variety of reasons – from “My data is already out there” to being unsure of what to do.</p> <p>The ITRC believes that organizations should review how they notify consumers of data breaches with the goal of reducing the level of inaction and improving the rates of credit freeze adoption.</p> <p>Additional findings</p> <p>The results of the survey, which includes answers from 1,050 U.S. adult consumers, have shown that 73 percent of the pollees have been affected by a data breach, and 72 percent received a notification letter about it.</p> <p>Also, that only 8 percent of respondents closely guard their passwords to prevent identity theft and fraud (they are more concerned about protecting their Social Security Numbers and payment card data), and only 15 percent of respondents use unique, complex passwords for each of their online accounts.</p> <p>The remaining 85 percent of users either use the same password for many accounts, use variations of the same password, or unique but easy to remember passwords.</p> <p>The reasons for not using a different password for each account are several (and likely overlapping):</p>  <p>“Consumers should follow password best practices, including long, unique passwords on every account,” the ITRC says, but also advises businesses to strongly recommend consumers reset any password that is not unique, as well as offer the option of enabling multi-factor authentication (MFA) using a mobile app.</p>

“Overall, consumers report a high level of awareness of data compromises and the range of actions they can take to protect themselves before and after a data breach. However, there is a [significant gap](#) between the level of awareness and the actions taken by consumers that leave most people vulnerable to additional attacks and a continuing risk of identity crimes,” the ITRC concluded.

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HEADLINE	11/22 'Tardigrade' hits biomanufacturing facility
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/tardigrade-malware-biomanufacturing/
GIST	<p>WHEN RANSOMWARE HIT a biomanufacturing facility this spring, something didn't sit right with the response team. The attackers left only a halfhearted ransom note, and didn't seem all that interested in actually collecting a payment. Then there was the malware they had used: a shockingly sophisticated strain dubbed Tardigrade.</p> <p>As the researchers at biomedical and cybersecurity firm BioBright dug further, they discovered that Tardigrade did more than simply lock down computers throughout the facility. The found that the malware could adapt to its environment, conceal itself, and even operate autonomously when cut off from its command and control server. This was something new.</p> <p>Today the cybersecurity nonprofit Bioeconomy Information Sharing and Analysis Center, or BIO-ISAC, of which BioBright is a member, is publicly disclosing findings about Tardigrade. While they're not making an attribution about who developed the malware, they say its sophistication and other digital forensic clues indicate a well-funded and motivated “advanced persistent threat” group. What's more, they say, the malware is “actively spreading” in the biomanufacturing industry.</p> <p>“This almost certainly started with espionage, but it has hit on everything—disruption, destruction, espionage, all of the above,” says Charles Fracchia, BioBright’s CEO. “It’s by far the most sophisticated malware we’ve seen in this space. This is eerily similar to other attacks and campaigns by nation state APTs targeting other industries.”</p> <p>As the world scrambles to develop, produce, and distribute cutting-edge vaccines and medications to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of biomanufacturing has been put on full display. Fracchia declined to comment about whether the victims do work related to Covid-19, but emphasized that their processes play a critical role.</p> <p>The researchers found that Tardigrade bears some resemblance to a popular malware downloader known as Smoke Loader. Also known as Dofail, the tool has been used to distribute malware payloads since at least 2011 or earlier, and is readily available on criminal forums. In 2018, Microsoft stymied a large cryptocurrency mining campaign that used Smoke Loader, and the security firm Proofpoint published findings in July about a data-stealing attack that disguised the downloader as a legitimate privacy tool to trick victims into installing it. Attackers can adapt the malware’s functionality with an assortment of ready-made plug-ins, and it’s known for using clever technical tricks to hide itself.</p> <p>The BioBright researchers say that despite the similarities to Smoke Loader, Tardigrade appears to be more advanced and offers an expanded array of customization options. It also adds the functionality of a trojan, meaning that once installed on a victim network it searches for stored passwords, deploys a keylogger, starts exfiltrating data, and establishes a backdoor for attackers to choose their own adventure.</p> <p>“This malware is designed to build itself differently in different environments, so the signature is constantly changing and it’s harder to detect,” says Callie Churchwell, a malware analyst at BioBright. “I tested it almost 100 times and every time it built itself in a different way and communicated differently. Additionally, if it’s not able to communicate with the command and control server, it has the capability to be more autonomous and self-sufficient, which was completely unexpected.”</p> <p>This means that Tardigrade can still make decisions about how to proceed within a victim network even if it gets cut off from the hackers who deployed it. The researchers say that Tardigrade seems to be primarily</p>

designed for distribution through phishing attacks, but could also spread through tainted USB sticks, or even move from one infected network to another autonomously with the right interconnections. The researchers chose the name “tardigrade” in honor of the water bear micro-animals that [can survive](#) extreme heat, cold, irradiation, and even [crash landing on the moon](#). The malware is similarly inconspicuous, adaptable, and resilient.

Nation state digital espionage against biotech and pharmaceutical companies has been increasingly common, says Charles Carmakal, senior vice president and chief technical officer of the cybersecurity firm Mandiant. Carmakal had not reviewed the Tardigrade research ahead of the disclosure, but says broadly that actors like China and Russia have worked consistently to grab intellectual property about enzymes, drugs, and manufacturing processes that could save those countries billions of dollars and years of research and development. The Covid-19 pandemic, he adds, [created additional incentives](#) for nation state attackers.

“Many of these incidents aren’t public, because if you have IP stolen, legally you don’t have to disclose it,” Carmakal says. “But we’ve seen financially motivated, disruptive attacks against health care companies and a variety of cyberattacks against biotech and pharma for espionage purposes.”

Carmakal adds that in some cases, these network infections have been traced to malicious USB drives.

BioBright’s Fracchia emphasizes that a lot remains unknown about Tardigrade's context and goals. It is unclear, for example, why attackers would use such a refined and sophisticated tool to deliver something as noisy and visible as ransomware—making it more likely that Tardigrade would be discovered. It's possible that the ransomware attack was a cover for other activity—a tactic that has been used before, including [famously by Russia](#)—but the researchers say they have no firm conclusions yet.

The stakes are high in biomanufacturing, Fracchia says, because many of the industrial networks used for production are built for openness and efficiency. Additional security and segmentation can complicate a highly choreographed manufacturing process. The BIO-ISAC prioritized coordinating public disclosure so potential victims can look for signs of infection and the broader security industry can be on alert. When the researchers first started investigating the malware, only a couple of virus scanners successfully detected it. Now a few dozen can flag it, and the researchers hope that even more will add protections.

“The basic design of many networks in the biomanufacturing field has inherent cybersecurity issues,” he says. “So with this disclosure we’re trying to not just say, ‘Hey, eat your vegetables.’ It’s come to the point where we’re basically saying the security equivalent of ‘Eat them or you’ll die.’”

If other industries are any indication, there’s no one warning that will motivate total systemic change overnight. But Tardigrade may act as an important wakeup call in a sector that is more critical than ever right now.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	11/22 Vehicle ramming into crowds: deadly tactic
SOURCE	https://www.firstpost.com/world/from-nice-in-2016-to-wisconsin-in-2021-how-ramming-vehicles-into-crowds-has-become-a-deadly-terror-tactic-10155121.html
GIST	<p>The use of a vehicle as a weapon in a terrorist attack is not new. Recent incidents carried out with intention of mass murder -- whether motivated by any agenda or not -- demonstrate that the use of vehicles as a weapon continues to be of interest.</p> <p>This is primarily because attacks of this nature require minimal capability, but can have a devastating impact in crowded places with low levels of visible security. Because it is so basic that a lone ranger attack can also deal maximum damage, it allows perpetrators to go under the radar of security agencies, who</p>

usually keep vigilance on online chatter about criminal ideations and on purchase and sale of weapons and explosives.

There are also recorded instances of terrorist groups encouraging their recruits to use vehicle ramming attacks to cause maximum damage with minimum investment.

Al Qaeda's Yemeni branch encouraged its Western recruits to use trucks as weapons. A 2010 webzine article, "The Ultimate Mowing Machine," called for deploying a pickup truck as a "mowing machine, not to mow grass but mow down the enemies of Allah, as per *CNN*."

In September 2014, Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani called for lone wolf attacks using improvised weaponry, "If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock or slaughter him with a knife or run him over with your car or throw him down from a high place or choke him or poison him."

What happened in Wisconsin, Waukesha was a horrid reminder that this primal and old, yet effective technique still attracts individuals driven to mass murder. Here is a look back at the past when vehicle ramming attacks caused destruction and damage.

2021 Wisconsin Christmas Parade: 5 dead 40 injured

A joyous scene of marching bands and children dancing in Santa hats and waving pompoms turned deadly in an instant, as an SUV sped through barricades and into a Christmas parade in suburban Milwaukee, killing at least five people and injuring more than 40 others.

One video showed a woman screaming, "Oh my God!" repeatedly as a group of young dancers was struck Sunday. A father talked of going "from one crumpled body to the other" in search of his daughter. Members of a "Dancing Grannies" club were among those hit.

A "person of interest" was in custody, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said, but he gave no details about the person or any possible motive. The investigation was ongoing, with assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Justice. The horror was recorded by the city's livestream and onlookers' cellphones.

2017 UK, London and Westminster attacks:

On 3 June 2017, a terrorist vehicle-ramming and stabbing took place in London, England. A van was deliberately driven into pedestrians on London Bridge, and then crashed on the south bank of the River Thames. Its three occupants then ran to the nearby Borough Market area and began stabbing people in and around restaurants and pubs.[8] They were shot dead by City of London Police officers, and were found to be wearing fake explosive vests.

Eight people were killed and 48 were injured, including members of the public and four unarmed police officers who attempted to stop the assailants. British authorities described the perpetrators as "radical Islamic terrorists".

Earlier in March, a man drove an SUV into a crowd on the sidewalk along the Westminster Bridge in London, killing at least four. After ramming the car into a barrier outside the House of Parliament, the driver exited the vehicle and stabbed a police officer to death. The attacker was eventually gunned down by a police officer. The assailant, Khalid Masood, 52, of West Midlands, reportedly had a criminal record and was radicalised by Islamic State recruiters.

2017 Manhattan New York: 8 dead, 11 hurt

In October 2017, an Islamic State-inspired individual used a commercial-grade rental truck to attack pedestrians on a busy bicycle path near lower Manhattan, New York City, killing 8 and injuring more than 11 others. A pellet gun and a paintball gun were recovered from the scene.

The 29-yr-old man driving in a Home Depot rental truck, hopped a curb at West Houston Street and drove south on the bike path on the west side of West Side Highway in lower Manhattan for several blocks, officials said. After crashing the truck into a school bus, the suspect left the vehicle while displaying imitation firearms and was shot in the abdomen by a police officer, according to the NYPD.

The perpetrator was a Uzbek national inspired by Islamic State.

2017 Sweden, Stockholm: Five dead, dozens injured

Eyewitnesses said a beer truck was hijacked as it made a delivery nearby and then barrelled at a high speed into a crowd along Drottninggatan, one of the city's major pedestrian thoroughfares, before crashing into a department store on 8 April 2017.

The suspect, a 39-year-old from the central Asian republic of Uzbekistan, has admitted to carrying out a "terrorist crime," his lawyer said.

This is how an eye-witness described it to *CNN*: "It was like he was driving through paper. It's like it was nothing. I can't even believe how a person could do such a thing. And then he just kept on going. I was in shock."

Carl Bildt, a former prime minister, wrote on Twitter: "Steal a lorry or a car and then drive it into a crowd. That seems to be the latest terrorist method. Berlin. London. Now Stockholm."

2017 Spain, Barcelona & Cambrils twin attacks: 14 killed over 100 injured

At least 14 people are killed and about 100 were injured on 17 August after a van plowed through a crowd of people in a popular tourist district in Barcelona, Spain. IS media wing, Amaq, issues a statement claiming responsibility, saying that the attackers are "soldiers of the Islamic State." On August 18, in Cambrils, a coastal city around 100 kilometers from Barcelona, five attackers drive an Audi A3 into several pedestrians, killing one. The attackers are shot and killed by police. A house explosion on 16 August, in Alcanar, south of Barcelona, is also believed to be connected to the attacks.

2016 Germany, Berlin: 12 dead, many injured

A Tunisian man drove a tractor-trailer into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people. In the wake of the attack, authorities conduct a manhunt for Anis Amri, 24, throughout Europe. He is shot and killed by police in Milan, Italy, four days after the attack. Hours after Amri's death, IS released a video of him pledging allegiance to the terrorist group.

The 24-year-old Tunisian national, a small-scale drug vendor and rejected asylum-seeker was known to police and had been monitored by authorities.

2016 France, Nice: 86 dead, hundreds injured

In one of the deadliest attacks of these kinds, on the evening of 14 July 2016, a 19-tonne cargo truck was deliberately driven into crowds of people celebrating Bastille Day on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France, resulting in the deaths of 86 people and the injury of 458 others. The driver was Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a Tunisian living in France.[5][6] The attack ended following an exchange of gunfire, during which Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was shot and killed by police.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, saying Lahouaiej-Bouhlel answered its "calls to target citizens of coalition nations that fight the Islamic State". His father, however, claimed he was suffering from a mental illness.

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HEADLINE	11/22 East Africa's terrorism hotspots
SOURCE	https://theconversation.com/east-africas-terrorism-hotspots-examining-the-roots-and-solutions-172154
GIST	<i>Uganda has had a string of terror attacks lately. The most recent bombings took place in Kampala's central business district and were claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group. Tensions have been increasing across the border too, in Kenya. The government has instructed security agencies to be</i>

more vigilant. Moina Spooner, of The Conversation Africa, asked terrorism researcher Dr Anneli Botha to provide insights into what drives terrorism in the region and how it should be addressed.

Where are Eastern Africa's terrorism hotspots?

Eastern Africa has two primary terrorism hotspots.

The first is Somalia. It has experienced continuous instability since 1991, due to clan-based warlords and the lack of a functioning central government. The creation of ungoverned spaces provided Al-Qaeda with a foothold in the region. Ethiopian intervention in 2006 added fuel to the fire after the establishment of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) earlier in the 2000s. In 2005, Al-Shabaab was established as an offshoot of the ICU to become the most relevant actor in Somalia. Since then it has executed attacks beyond its area of operations in [Uganda](#), [Djibouti](#) and Kenya.

Al-Shabaab has been [recruiting](#) from marginalised communities in Kenya. It has also attracted fighters from Uganda, Tanzania, Djibouti, the US and Europe.

Secondly, similar to Somalia, the eastern part of the DRC has been a hotspot since its own civil war from [1997 to 2003](#). An ungoverned part of the country provided a "safe" area where over 100 rebel organisations could base their operations. Groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces and Lord's Resistance Army from Uganda, under pressure from Ugandan security forces, established themselves in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) along with others in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

The origins of the [Allied Democratic Forces](#) can be traced back to Christian-Muslim and ethnic divisions even before independence in 1962. The perception of government interference in Muslim affairs played a role in establishing the idea of fighting for an Islamic state (not Islamic State as we know it today). The change in leadership following the arrest of Jamil Mukulu introduced a new chapter under Seka Musa Baluku. Since 2019, the organisation has executed attacks under the umbrella of Islamic State in the Central African Province (IS-CAP), which is also linked to the instability in northern Mozambique.

In the DRC, the local communities within the organisation's area of operations have had to bear the brunt of attacks.

What have been the main root causes of terror attacks in the region?

The root causes of terror attacks are domestic, with origins in each country's history. There is no single "profile" or reason. It is always a combination of factors – political, social, and economic – that cannot be separated from regional and international events.

The main question is why anyone would want to join any violent extremist organisation, risking death or capture.

Some join voluntarily. Identity politics, due to existing ethnic and religious divisions and subsequent marginalisation and frustration, can drive people to join violent extremist organisations. Others will join for financial reasons.

The final "push" relates to the way security forces respond to the terrorist threat. In my [research since 2011](#) and as part of [research projects](#) with the United Nations Development Programme and Finn Church Aid, involving interviews with former members of violent extremist organisations, I've heard repeatedly how revenge, anger and hatred of governments and their security forces drove people into joining.

Some are tricked into joining, not knowing what they've signed up for. Others are forced, especially where not joining could be interpreted as spying for the government, as [witnessed](#) in Somalia.

In Somalia there is also a nationalistic-religious component that facilitated recruitment into Al-Shabaab. This followed the intervention of Ethiopia (supported by the United States), then Uganda, Kenya and Djibouti (African Union Mission troop contributing countries). These are regarded as "Christian nations"

invading a Muslim country. It played into a broader narrative starting with the US and western intervention in Afghanistan, but especially Iraq following 9/11.

How have governments sought to deal with terror attacks and their root causes?

Predominantly from a short-term security perspective, by “eliminating” the “problem” of suspected terrorists. This has included disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

The way governments respond depends on the level of government control over territory. Where government has no or limited control, the military takes the lead in counterinsurgency (as seen in Somalia and eastern DRC). Where government control increases, the police take the lead. Respecting human rights while countering violent extremism and terrorism has [proved](#) to be particularly [difficult](#) under military command. One reason is that the military’s focus is not on collecting evidence to build a criminal case.

Governments worldwide seldom look into their role in communal marginalisation and frustration. But it’s a crucial root cause. People feel excluded if development in their part of the country is neglected because they don’t support certain politicians.

Have governments been successful? If not, why?

No, unfortunately not completely, due to two primary challenges.

First, limited capacity and training and a history of very limited relations between the state, its security forces and the public across the continent. Security sector reforms and community policing initiatives require trust, dedication and time.

Second, governments on the continent have tended to invest more in the military (securing their regime) and not in the police and the broader criminal justice framework (including the judiciary and prisons). Third, addressing the root causes is not the responsibility of security agencies only. It requires an all of government approach starting with good governance and providing basic public goods equally.

What else should they do?

International organisations – for example the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, through its Regional Office for Eastern Africa and Interpol – and the international community have made considerable strides in building capacity and providing equipment to law enforcement agencies across the region. This happens under the guidance of the [Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation](#).

Also NGOs and a growing civil society, through research and working with vulnerable communities, provide important guidance and support.

Government and security agencies must be willing to receive support and act in a responsible manner to prevent and counter violent extremism. In eastern Africa, this investment has started to show results. This is clear if one compares the [DusitD2 attacks in Nairobi in 2019](#), when law enforcement took the lead, with the [2013 Westgate attack](#), when the military took the lead.

Not all countries have received assistance across the region. Nor can the threat of violent extremism be addressed by individual countries. Violent extremism and organised crime always present transnational challenges. Coordinated efforts, cooperation and capacity building are needed to address an increasing threat that is already having a ripple effect into southern Africa.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Burkina Faso cuts internet: public security
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/burkina-faso-says-it-cut-internet-under-national-defence-provision-2021-11-23/
GIST	OUAGADOUGOU, Nov 22 (Reuters) - Burkina Faso's government said on Monday it had cut mobile internet access in the country under a legal provision related to national defence and public security.

	<p>The internet went out on Saturday in the wake of protests against French military forces and the government over their inability to stop rising violence by Islamist militants.</p> <p>State security forces suffered their heaviest loss in years last week when gunmen killed 49 military police officers and four civilians near the northern town of Inata.</p> <p>Frequent attacks by jihadists linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State have ravaged Burkina Faso since 2017, killing hundreds of soldiers and civilians and forcing more than a million people from their homes.</p> <p>The government said in a statement that the mobile internet suspension would last 96 hours, adding that fixed internet connections were not affected by the order.</p> <p>It did not say what specifically had led to the suspension but cited a legal provision related to "the quality and security of networks and services and the respect of obligations of national defence and public security."</p> <p>Hundreds of people massed on the main road through the city of Kaya over the weekend to block the path of French armoured vehicles and call for French troops to leave Burkina Faso.</p> <p>Former colonial power France has thousands of soldiers in West Africa's Sahel region to battle the militants, who are primarily active in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Taliban ban women Afghan TV dramas
SOURCE	https://www.kake.com/story/45259477/women-banned-from-afghan-television-dramas-under-new-taliban-media-rules
GIST	<p>Women will be barred from appearing in television dramas in Afghanistan under the Taliban's new media restrictions, in the latest rollback of women's freedoms since the militant group seized power three months ago.</p> <p>All dramas, soap operas and entertainment shows featuring women are prohibited, according to the government guidelines issued to broadcasters on Sunday.</p> <p>The country's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice issued eight directives concerning what is allowed to be broadcast, in the first restrictions of their kind imposed on the country's media network.</p> <p>Among the directives, women news presenters must now wear headscarves on screen. Similarly, men on screen must wear "proper clothes," although the guidelines do not specify which types of clothes are considered "proper."</p> <p>The ministry added that films in opposition to Islamic law and Afghan values should not be broadcast, nor should foreign and domestic films that "promote foreign culture and values."</p> <p>The rules also state that entertainment and comedy programs "should not be based on insulting others," nor "for the insult of human dignity and Islamic values."</p> <p>Finally, TV shows depicting the "prophets and companions" should not be broadcast, it said.</p> <p>Under the previous Taliban government -- in power from 1996 to 2001 -- television was prohibited as well as most other forms of media.</p> <p>Monday's tough new media rules come despite pledges from the Taliban that they would be more moderate in exercising power this time around.</p>

	<p>The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in mid-August as the United States and Western allies withdrew their forces. Women and girls were quickly instructed to stay home from work and school, and the restrictions on television appearances further limit women's freedoms under the new regime.</p> <p>When a group of women protested the announcement of the all-male government in Kabul in September, Taliban fighters beat them with whips and sticks.</p> <p>In October, CNN spoke to women in Kabul who were returning to public spaces after staying inside during the initial first few uncertain weeks of Taliban rule.</p> <p>But the Taliban's latest media ruling shows women's presence in public life is still precarious.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 US blacklists leaders of IS Afghan branch
SOURCE	https://nationalpost.com/pmnn/news-pmn/u-s-blacklists-3-leaders-financial-facilitator-for-afghan-affiliate-of-islamic-state
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States on Monday imposed sanctions on three leaders of Islamic State's Afghanistan branch and another man it accused of acting as a financial facilitator for the group, in a move that follows a series of attacks in Kabul claimed by the militant group.</p> <p>The State Department on Monday named the group's emir, Sanaullah Ghafari, spokesperson Sultan Aziz Azam and Kabul province leader Maulaw Rajab as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.</p> <p>The U.S. Treasury Department also blacklisted Ismatullah Khalezai, accusing him of operating a Turkey-based informal money-moving network, known as a hawala, to transfer funds to finance the Islamic State-Khorasan Province.</p> <p>"Today's designation underscores the United States' determination to prevent ISIS-K and its members from exploiting the international financial system to support terrorist acts in Afghanistan and beyond," said Andrea Gacki, director of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, using a common name for Islamic State-Khorasan Province.</p> <p>The U.N. envoy to Afghanistan last week delivered a bleak assessment of the situation following the Taliban takeover, saying that the affiliate of the Islamic State group has grown and now appears present in nearly all 34 provinces.</p> <p>Islamic State claimed responsibility for two explosions that hit a heavily Shi'ite Muslim area of Kabul, the Afghan capital, last week, killing at least one person and wounding at least six others.</p> <p>The blasts were the latest in a series of attacks in Kabul claimed by the militant Sunni group in recent days, with Shi'ite areas in the west of the city targeted several times. The group has also launched attacks on Shi'ite mosques in the northern city of Kunduz and the southern city of Kandahar.</p> <p>The attacks have added pressure on the Taliban government, which is grappling with a deepening economic crisis, and dented its assertion that it has restored security to Afghanistan after decades of war.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Militants kill 12 eastern Congo attack
SOURCE	https://news.trust.org/item/20211122150511-6az91/
GIST	GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nov 22 (Reuters) - Militiamen killed at least 12 people during an attack on displaced civilians in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a military spokesperson said on Monday, and some local groups said the death toll was much higher.

Fighters from the CODECO militia raided the village of Drodro on Sunday night, killing six children, four men and two women, Jules Ngongo, a spokesperson for Ituri's military government, told Reuters.

Repeated attacks by CODECO have killed hundreds of civilians in Ituri province's Djugu territory since 2017 and forced thousands to flee their homes, according to the United Nations.

CODECO's fighters are drawn mainly from the Lendu farming community, which has long been in conflict with Hema herders.

"Their objective was to attack the population that was displaced in Drodro," Ngongo said.

Others said the toll was higher.

Ngabu Lidja Chrysante, a priest and coordinator for the Catholic charity Caritas in Ituri, said his colleagues on the ground had seen the bodies of 35 people killed in the attack, which also targeted the local church.

Kivu Security Tracker, which maps violence in Congo, said 107 bodies had been found in Drodro and surrounding villages.

Mathias Gilman, the spokesperson for the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo, said at least 16,000 people fleeing the attacks had taken shelter at a nearby site protected by peacekeepers.

CODECO spokesperson Patrick Basa denied the group had killed civilians. He told Reuters its fighters had clashed in Drodro with a Hema militia but said the civilians had already fled the area.

Conflict between Lendu and Hema from 1999 to 2007 resulted in an estimated 50,000 deaths in one of the bloodiest chapters of a civil war in eastern Congo.

Ituri and neighbouring North Kivu province have been run by military officers since May when the government declared a state of siege in response to rampant violence, but the killings have not shown any sign of abating since then.

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HEADLINE	11/22 UN: Afghan banking system faces collapse
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/exclusive-un-warns-colossal-collapse-afghan-banking-system-2021-11-22/
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS, Nov 22 (Reuters) - The United Nations on Monday pushed for urgent action to prop up Afghanistan's banks, warning that a spike in people unable to repay loans, lower deposits and a cash liquidity crunch could cause the financial system to collapse within months.</p> <p>In a three-page report on Afghanistan's banking and financial system seen by Reuters, the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) said the economic cost of a banking system collapse - and consequent negative social impact - "would be colossal."</p> <p>An abrupt withdrawal of most foreign development support after the Taliban seized power on Aug. 15 from Afghanistan's Western-backed government has sent the economy into freefall, putting a severe strain on the banking system which set weekly withdrawal limits to stop a run on deposits.</p> <p>"Afghanistan's financial and bank payment systems are in disarray. The bank-run problem must be resolved quickly to improve Afghanistan's limited production capacity and prevent the banking system from collapsing," the UNDP report said.</p> <p>Finding a way to avert a collapse is complicated by international and unilateral sanctions on Taliban leaders.</p>

"We need to find a way to make sure that if we support the banking sector, we are not supporting Taliban," Abdallah al Dardari, head of UNDP in Afghanistan, told Reuters.

"We are in such a dire situation that we need to think of all possible options and we have to think outside the box," he said. "What used to be three months ago unthinkable has to become thinkable now."

Afghanistan's banking system was already vulnerable before the Taliban came to power. But since then development aid has dried up, billions of dollars in Afghan assets have been frozen abroad, and the United Nations and aid groups are now struggling to get enough cash into the country.

The United States is working with the United Nations, UNDP and other international institutions and countries "to find ways to offer liquidity, to infuse, to see to it that the people of Afghanistan can take advantage of international support in ways that don't flow into the coffers of the Taliban," said State Department spokesman Ned Price.

'UNDER THE MATTRESS'

The UNDP's proposals to save the banking system include a deposit insurance scheme, measures to ensure adequate liquidity for short- and medium-term needs, as well as credit guarantees and loan repayment delay options.

"Coordination with the International Financial Institutions, with their extensive experience of the Afghan financial system, would be critical to this process," UNDP said in its report, referring to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The United Nations has repeatedly warned since the Taliban took over that Afghanistan's economy is on the brink of a collapse that would likely further fuel a refugee crisis. UNDP said that if the banking system fails, it could take decades to rebuild.

The UNDP report said that with current trends and withdrawal restrictions, about 40% of Afghanistan's deposit base will be lost by the end of the year. It said banks have stopped extending new credit, and that non-performing loans had almost doubled to 57% in September from the end of 2020.

"If this rate continues of non-performing loans, the banks may not have a chance to survive in the next six months. And I am being optimistic," al Dardari said.

Liquidity has also been a problem. Afghan banks heavily relied on physical shipments of U.S. dollars, which have stopped. When it comes to the local afghani currency, al Dardari said that while there is about \$4 billion worth of afghanis in the economy, only about \$500 million worth is in circulation.

"The rest is sitting under the mattress or under the pillow because people are afraid," he said.

As the United Nations seeks to avert famine in Afghanistan, al Dardari also warned about the consequences of a banking collapse for trade finance.

"Afghanistan last year imported about \$7 billion worth of goods and products and services, mostly foodstuff ... If there is no trade finance the interruption is huge," he said. "Without the banking system, none of this can happen."

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	11/22 WA doctor 'exemptions for sale'
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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/covid-vaccine-exemptions-for-sale-anna-elperin-awake-health-ellensburg/281-3fdbfa97-32fb-41b4-a25b-2394b0d38afd
GIST	<p>An Ellensburg doctor removed her mask as she entered a small medical exam room in October and began signing a COVID-19 vaccine exemption form for a first-time patient, without asking a single question about her medical history.</p> <p>It was just one week before thousands of unvaccinated Washington state, school and health care employees faced losing their jobs over a statewide vaccine mandate.</p> <p>The only way most workers who were opposed to being vaccinated against COVID-19 could potentially keep their jobs was to seek a religious or medical exemption before the Oct. 18 deadline. But such medical exemptions required documentation from a licensed physician, like Dr. Anna Elperin.</p> <p>“Patient Taylor Mirfendereski due to a medical condition is exempt from getting the COVID-19 Vaccination,” wrote Elperin, a doctor of osteopathic medicine and the owner of the functional medicine clinic, Awake Health, in Ellensburg.</p> <p>The patient, undercover KING 5 investigative reporter Taylor Mirfendereski who visited Elperin’s Kittitas County office on Oct. 11, does not have a medical condition that precludes her from getting the COVID vaccine.</p> <p>But Elperin never asked Mirfendereski if that were true. And she wrote her the exemption.</p> <p>For a \$150 cash fee, Elperin filled out and signed her name on three separate exemption forms that excused the undercover reporter from following local and state COVID mask and vaccine mandates because of doctor’s orders.</p> <p>A three-month KING 5 investigation found Elperin repeatedly signed and sold those mask and COVID vaccine exemptions to residents across Washington state, in some cases with no questions asked. The doctor wrote exemptions for patients who did not provide a legitimate medical reason to receive one, including people who sought to evade local and state pandemic-related mandates. Charging each patient from \$150 to \$200 for the forms, Elperin potentially raked in tens of thousands of dollars from medical exemption sales a month and profited from state, local and private company policies intended to reduce the spread of coronavirus.</p> <p>“What you just described is an ‘exemption mill,’” said Dr. Gabriel Bosslet, one of three national medical ethics experts consulted for this story and an associate professor at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. “You hand over money, and I ask no questions and give you a piece of paper that satisfies the state that you have an exemption.”</p> <p>This investigation is based on the experiences of four undercover journalists who received mask and vaccine exemptions signed by Elperin this fall. Reporters also interviewed three former Awake Health employees, who said they watched the doctor sell hundreds of COVID-related exemptions without asking patients medical questions or conducting any medical exams.</p> <p>'I DON'T DO COOKBOOK MEDICINE'</p> <p>Three of the four undercover journalists who made appointments at Awake Health in October and early November wore hidden cameras during their office visits with the doctor. The cameras captured video of Elperin signing the exemption documents. Washington law restricts recording conversations without consent so the cameras did not record audio during the appointments.</p> <p>While most of the journalists who received medical exemptions didn’t ask for the paperwork until they were in the exam room, one journalist asked for the exemption forms while making his November appointment. The receptionist, without hesitation, quoted him a \$200 price.</p>

An Awake Health medical assistant measured the journalists' weight, height and blood pressure at the start of the visits. In a few instances, she asked some journalists to report any diseases that run in their families. Elperin, the doctor, did not ask the journalists medical questions related to the COVID vaccine or their medical history. Yet, she wrote in the exemption paperwork that each of the patients were exempt from the vaccine because of "a medical condition."

In one case, a journalist told the Awake Health medical assistant that he was healthy and did not have a qualifying medical condition that would preclude him from receiving the vaccine. Elperin signed his mask and vaccine exemption forms anyway.

"This is a problem," said Thaddeus Pope, a professor at [Mitchell Hamline School of Law](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota, who specializes in medical ethics and law.

"We trust physicians to make all sorts of determinations all the time and sometimes....people pay for the conclusion that they want as opposed to the conclusion that the evidence actually warrants," he said.

Pope and two other national medical ethics experts said good clinical practice requires licensed medical professionals to conduct an examination of their patients and evaluate their medical history before making a determination about whether a medical exemption for any vaccine is necessary.

"You should have a thorough workup of that particular patient," said Ross Silverman, professor of health services administration and policy at [Temple University's College of Public Health](#) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "You wouldn't give somebody a new medication with zero medical history just because somebody says, 'I want this drug.' It's the same thing with this medical exemption."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends COVID-19 vaccination for anyone over the age of 5 to prevent the spread of the virus.

Millions of people in the United States [have safely received](#) the COVID vaccines since they were first authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. And there are currently [few medical justifications](#) that, CDC officials say, may prevent someone from getting the vaccine or require that they take precautions before getting vaccinated.

"There are [two reasons](#) that are generally accepted," Pope, the medical ethics and legal expert, said. "One is that you're allergic to one of the ingredients in one of the vaccines, and the other is that you actually had a severe reaction to the first dose, and then that might be a reason [not to get the second dose](#)."

It's why medical ethicists and most practicing physicians believe there's supposed to be a high bar to secure a medical exemption from a doctor.

"It's not a rubber stamp. You don't just come and say, 'I need an exemption,' and as a physician, I say, 'Ok, great. I'll sign that,'" said Bosslet, the Indiana University professor who is also a pulmonary and critical care physician. "There are medical reasons that would compel me to sign a document saying, 'This person should not have the COVID-19 vaccine.' It's just that those, in my mind, are pretty few and far between."

During a Nov. 12 interview, Elperin explained that writing medical exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccine is an "individual" process that consists of a doctor carefully reviewing a patient's medical history and current health conditions to determine whether an exemption is "advisable."

"I don't do cookbook medicine," Elperin said. "When patients come in and they would like to be evaluated for a COVID vaccine exemption, we sit down and we talk and we come up with a treatment plan."

The four undercover journalists, who say they don't have medical conditions that qualify them to be exempt from receiving the vaccine, paid a total of \$750 for Elperin's COVID vaccine and mask exemptions.

On the day of the state vaccine mandate deadline, reporters found Elperin upped her price. She began charging her patients \$200 for vaccine and mask exemptions — \$50 more than Mirfendereski paid a week earlier.

When confronted about the medical exemptions she signed and sold to KING 5's undercover journalists, Elperin unequivocally denied that she is running an "exemption mill."

The doctor said she has "no idea" if she wrote exemptions for the journalists without asking them medical questions or conducting medical exams because she would have to "go back and carefully review the chart."

"I would have no way of knowing any of this based on just the vaccine exemption form...I don't have that information stored in memory," Elperin said. "Just because a person claims to you that it happens doesn't make it such."

At the conclusion of the interview, KING 5 provided Elperin copies of medical exemption forms she signed to give her a chance to further review the documents and examine her medical chart.

When contacted via email on Nov. 15, three days after the sit-down interview, the doctor did not answer a list of detailed further questions about her actions. Instead, she responded Friday, saying: "You should be ashamed of yourself. You are a disgrace to the profession of investigative journalism, and to the values of the United States of America."

'SELLING EXEMPTION FORMS LIKE CANDY'

A former Awake Health office manager, a medical assistant, and an aesthetician, who all quit the functional medicine practice in late September, said Elperin wrote COVID vaccine exemptions for dozens of patients each week over the course of several months.

Abby Jamison, Awake Health's former master aesthetician, said Elperin started writing exemptions in late spring 2021 as the COVID vaccine became more widely available and talk of mandates started to escalate. She said demand for Elperin's mask and vaccine exemptions increased dramatically in August and September, as the state's Oct. 18 vaccine mandate deadline grew near.

"About 90% of Dr. Elperin's patients every day were COVID exemption patients," Jamison said. "Anyone off the street could get it. There was no medical history reviewed....It was just like, 'Here's a piece of paper.'"

State records show Elperin was under scrutiny from state investigators shortly before most of her staff members said they left their jobs. Jamison said she quit Awake Health because she was concerned that continuing to work for Elperin under the circumstances could jeopardize her professional license.

"She was going about it all wrong by not doing a medical exam prior to the exemption being given," Jamison said.

Jamison and the two other former employees who spoke with reporters in separate conversations about the doctor's conduct said many of Elperin's exemption "customers" were first-time patients who drove multiple hours from faraway locations like Bellingham, Seattle and Spokane — and who sometimes waited even longer in the office to see the doctor.

They said a lot of her patients who sought medical exemptions worked in professions that were subject to state or local vaccine mandates, including police officers, firefighters, teachers, health care professionals and state employees.

“I don’t agree with selling exemption forms like candy,” Jamison said. “I knew it was a problem because I had people driving four hours away to see her. I’m like, ‘If other physicians were giving these exemptions out, they wouldn’t be coming all this way.’

“It kind of spread like wildfire,” she added.

When asked via email if it was typical for the doctor to write medical exemptions for first-time patients, Elperin did not respond.

Elperin signed 20% of all exemptions filed at Ellensburg’s largest employer, Central Washington University, where proof of vaccination is now required for all students and employees. About one of every five of the 85 vaccine and mask exemptions submitted by the university’s students and staff came from Awake Health, according to public records.

But medical exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccine aren’t always granted.

Of the 17 mask and vaccine Awake Health waivers submitted by students and staff, Central Washington University approved five student exemptions and none from university employees.

Each agency, organization and private company with a vaccine mandate sets its own process for reviewing and granting or denying exemptions. Some employers may conclude there’s insufficient medical proof that a person can’t receive the COVID-19 vaccine or they may request additional information about a person’s diagnosis. And even if workers are granted an exemption, they may still be fired if accommodations can’t be found for them in less public-facing positions.

For instance, there were more than 1,300 Washington state agency employees who requested a medical exemption from the COVID vaccine, according to [the latest data](#) from the Washington State Office of Financial Management. The state approved 881 of those exemptions, but as of Nov. 1, less than half of those workers had received accommodations.

It’s not clear how many employers across the state accepted COVID medical vaccine and mask exemptions that Elperin signed or how many other doctors across the state are providing them.

In September, the Washington Medical Commission (WMC) issued a [public statement](#) against COVID-19 misinformation. The state medical board promised to scrutinize any complaints about practitioners granting vaccine or mask exemptions that are “not based in established science or variable fact.”

“A practitioner who grants a mask or other exemption without conducting an appropriate prior exam and without a finding of a legitimate medical reason supporting such an exemption within the standard of care, may be subjecting their license to disciplinary action,” the state medical board declared in the Sept. 27 statement.

As a doctor of osteopathic medicine, Elperin isn’t licensed by the Washington Medical Commission. She answers to the [Board of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery](#). Both boards fall under the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).

DOH, the agency responsible for regulating the state’s health care providers, is currently investigating at least two COVID-related complaints about Elperin, according to public records. It remained unclear, however, if those investigations stem from the exemptions.

Citing the ongoing disciplinary process, a DOH spokesperson declined an interview request and did not share details about the allegations against the doctor.

When asked about the DOH investigations, Elperin explained she’s under investigation because of a “disgruntled employee” who made “completely untrue statements” to investigators.

State records show the agency has received a total of 12 mostly COVID-related complaints against Elperin since July 2020. DOH closed 10 complaints without action.

But it referred one of those closed complaints to a different state agency, which did take action against the doctor this fall.

NO MASKS, FINES AND 'SCAMDEMIC'

The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), which regulates worker and workplace safety in the state, fined Elperin \$3,000 in September for “a serious violation” of COVID safety protocols.

An agency spokesperson said L&I got involved after receiving a direct complaint that workers were being put at risk because Elperin “refused to wear a mask” and “employees and patients, including some who were sick with COVID-19, were not required to wear masks.”

When an L&I investigator visited Elperin’s medical practice on Sept. 3, she observed the doctor, staff members and some patients weren’t wearing face masks, according to the inspector’s handwritten notes. The investigator documented that Elperin “refused” to put a mask on. She also observed the office lacked protective barriers and did not have any health screening protocols like temperature checks for patients and staff, according to the L&I report.

“I asked the inspector to leave the premises,” Elperin said.

In spite of receiving that hefty fine in September, Elperin continues to defy the Washington state mask mandate, and she’s not shy about it.

“I personally don’t feel that masks are protecting or helping me in any way, shape or form. In fact, they increase my anxiety,” Elperin said during the Nov. 12 interview with reporters. “If my staff would like to wear a mask, they certainly can. If they would like not to wear a mask, they do not have to do it.

“It is not my job to police others,” she said.

During three of the four undercover journalists’ office visits, Elperin did not wear a mask while walking throughout the medical office. When KING 5 reporter Mirfendereski visited the office on Oct. 11, Elperin temporarily wore a mask but immediately removed it upon walking into the patient exam room.

Throughout the pandemic, Elperin has been publicly outspoken about her views on COVID-19, the vaccine and what she calls “unconstitutional” government mandates.

She has repeatedly made baseless statements about COVID that are unsupported with scientific evidence and she has minimized the seriousness of the pandemic in social media posts, at public events and in an interview with reporters.

“This is a scamdemic. This has little to do with public health at this point. It has more to do with government control,” said Elperin, who likened the situation to her experience growing up in Estonia, where she said she was raised by a Russian family.

“Based on my personal background of knowing what it’s like to live in a country where the government controls what you are able or not able to do, that kind of gave me the courage to start openly speaking about how I feel about it,” she added.

Elperin’s former patients, Jeff and Shelley Ghan, said the doctor openly ranted about her unconventional views on COVID-19 for the duration of Jeff’s annual physical exam in April 2021 instead of attending to his medical care.

“I didn’t even have time to talk about the issues I was having — medical issues — nor did she ask about how I was feeling,” Jeff Ghan said. “I felt that I had to come up with a solution for my own medical diagnosis.”

They said the doctor compared coronavirus to the flu, talked about her lack of trust in the COVID-19 vaccine and complained about COVID-related business closures.

“From a professional perspective, it was a little unsettling,” Jeff Ghan said. “I thought, ‘Well, maybe she’s not really the right doctor for us.’”

Elperin did not respond to a question about Ghan’s claims.

In October 2020, another former Awake Health patient wrote a negative review about Elperin on Facebook, raising concerns that Elperin refers to the COVID-19 pandemic as a “scamdemic.” The patient, Ashton Asbury, also complained that the doctor and her staff did not wear masks during her appointment.

Asbury said she received a “dismissal letter” from Awake Health the next month.

“I regret to inform you that I will no longer be able to be your doctor, as of Nov. 23, 2020,” Elperin wrote, according to a copy of the November 2020 letter Asbury shared with KING 5.

Elperin denies that she dismissed any of her patients for disagreeing with her views.

“Absolutely not,” she said. “This is the kind of space where you come in and my job is to make you feel welcome and open, and my job is to help you to the extent that I can.”

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HEADLINE	11/22 Canada activist: ‘pipelines will be blown up’
SOURCE	https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/pipelines-will-be-blown-up-says-david-suzuki-if-leaders-dont-act-on-climate-change
GIST	<p>David Suzuki, the godfather of the Canadian environmental movement, warned over the weekend that if politicians don’t act to reverse climate change, there could be attacks against oil and gas infrastructure.</p> <p>“We’re in deep, deep doo-doo,” said Suzuki Saturday, speaking at an Extinction Rebellion protest on Vancouver Island. “This is what we’re come to. The next stage after this, there are going to be pipelines blown up if our leaders don’t pay attention to what’s going on.”</p> <p>Suzuki, reached by the National Post on Monday, said violence within the environmental movement is already happening, although he identified police actions against anti-logging protesters and anti-gas pipeline protesters as the culprits.</p> <p>Asked whether or not he would support the bombing of pipelines, Suzuki said, “Of course not.”</p> <p>“The violence is coming from the authorities, from government, from the RCMP,” said Suzuki. “They’re declaring war against those that are protesting.”</p> <p>Still, Suzuki warned he feels that there are few remaining options for protesters who feel government isn’t moving rapidly enough to tackle climate change. What else is there but violence, he wondered.</p> <p>“I think it’s going to be threatened by groups that feel government isn’t going anything,” Suzuki said.</p> <p>It wouldn’t be unprecedented. In Alberta, in the 1990s, Wiebo Ludwig, who died in 2012, engaged in a running war with the oil and gas sector in northwestern Alberta. He was convicted in 2000 for bombing a Suncor well in 1998, though Ludwig maintained his innocence.</p>

“If the oil companies run roughshod over your lives, you have to take defensive action against them, whatever is necessary,” Ludwig said in 1997, after two wells near his home were blown up. “You can’t just let them kill your children.”

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney called for Suzuki’s comments to be universally condemned.

“This incitement to violence by David Suzuki is dangerous,” he wrote in a tweet on Monday. “In Canada we resolve our differences peacefully and democratically, not with threats of terrorism or acts of violence.”

Erin O’Toole, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, echoed Kenney’s Twitter comments, calling Suzuki’s remarks dangerous and undemocratic, and saying they should be condemned.

The event in Victoria, called Funeral for the Future, came on the heels of extreme weather in British Columbia last week that left a handful of people dead and caused major damage to infrastructure in the province. Shortly before that, world leaders had gathered in Glasgow, Scotland, for a climate conference.

Protesters were calling on the British Columbia government to declare a “climate emergency,” and end investment in pipelines and other fossil fuel infrastructure.

“People in Extinction Rebellion are saying we’re headed in a direction of extinction and we’re rebelling against it. That’s why I’m here,” Suzuki said, according to CHEK News.

Ellis Ross, the MLA for Skeena, who’s running to lead the B.C. Liberal party, told the Post that this sort of rhetoric is “irresponsible” and “reckless.”

“It’s quite scary, to be honest,” Ross said. “We’re talking about violence.”

Ross said he’s come across this attitude before, from those who felt there were no other options left.

“This kind of language is going on too far in our society, we’re not teaching the next generation the right principles,” he said. “I really talked people down off this, we didn’t need violence ... ultimately what we needed is actually a bigger conversation.”

The Insurance Bureau of Canada said the latest extreme weather to hit B.C. is another sign that climate change is a “clear and present danger.”

Aaron Sutherland, vice-president of the bureau’s Pacific region, told Postmedia that while B.C. had been relatively spared the effects of previous extreme weather events compared to other provinces and countries, all that changed in 2021.

“We opened the year with some severe storms, had the heat dome, really devastating wildfires, and now we’ve had this,” he said referring to last week’s rainstorm, flooding and mudslides.

“It should be a real wake-up call that climate change isn’t some future threat. It is a clear and present danger that’s increasingly impacting all of us today.”

Nationally, average annual cost of property damage or losses due to severe weather has increased to about \$2 billion annually in the past few years from about \$400 million before 2009.

Suzuki did not attend this year’s COP26 conference, because, as he told CTV’s Your Morning, not only does he not want to fly anymore, but also because “it’s the 26th conference,” he said with some emphasis. “For the first time in 26 meetings, they’ve got fossil fuels actually in their documents this year. Is this progress?”

	<p>The lack of movement by Canada on the environmental front continues to fuel his passion. “Canada has made promise after promise after promise to reduce or cap our emissions,” he said. “We have never even tried to meet the promises we’ve made.</p> <p>“It’s all negotiations and horse-trading,” he said. “The largest delegation of people that have official status there are the 503 delegates from the fossil fuel industry — that’s more than all of the representatives of the eight countries most heavily impacted by climate change.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Treasury: wait a year for inflation to cool
SOURCE	https://www.macaubusiness.com/monthly-us-inflation-to-return-to-0-2-0-3-pct-in-second-half-of-2022-yellen/
GIST	<p>US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Monday she expects current record-high inflation to ease, with monthly rates falling back to 0.2 or 0.3 percent in the second half of 2022.</p> <p>“I’m hoping and expecting in the second half of next year, to see monthly CPI (consumer price index) rates coming in more in the range of two tenths or three tenths,” Yellen told an annual meeting of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce in the state of Rhode Island.</p> <p>“I think in the second half of next year, we’ll begin to see inflation subside and the way you’ll be able to see that is by looking at monthly inflation rates,” added Yellen, who addressed the forum virtually.</p> <p>US President Joe Biden has made fighting inflation a top priority after data showed consumer prices hit a 30-year high in October, fueling a slump in his public approval.</p> <p>In October, prices rose 0.9 percent compared to September, according to the CPI index of the Department of Labor.</p> <p>Compared to October 2020, inflation reached 6.2 percent, its highest level in 30 years.</p> <p>The annual inflation rate will decline at a slower pace, Yellen said.</p> <p>She added that as demand shifts from goods to services and as immunization is ramped up in Asia, where a large part of the goods imported and sold in the United States and around the world are manufactured, supply chain pressures will ease.</p> <p>Another index measuring inflation, the PCE, favored by the US Federal Reserve, is slated to be released on Wednesday.</p> <p>Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, whom Biden reappointed Monday for a second term, said that the regulator will work to prevent high levels of US inflation from “becoming entrenched.”</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	11/23 Brazen takeover robbers hit Calif. stores
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/breed-brazen-takeover-robbers-hitting-130021558.html
GIST	<p>The mayhem began Friday night, when thieves smashed a Louis Vuitton storefront window in San Francisco's Union Square and ransacked the store. Criminals also targeted about a dozen nearby stores for theft and vandalism, police said, including a Burberry and Hermes store, as well as an eyeglass shop and cannabis dispensaries.</p>

On Saturday night, the [raid of the Nordstrom in nearby Walnut Creek](#) was even more audacious: Just before closing time, some 80 people jumped out of a pack of cars, flash-mob style, and swarmed the aisles, many escaping with merchandise. Two employees were assaulted, one of them pepper sprayed.

And just after midnight Sunday, criminals used a sledgehammer to [smash storefront windows](#) at a Louis Vuitton and Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills, police said, but patrol cars arrived to scare the thieves off before they could get inside. Late Monday, another group attempted to break into the Nordstrom at the Grove shopping center in Los Angeles before leading police on a high-speed chase.

Organized retail theft is nothing new. Over the last few years, rings have targeted Rolex watches, fine jewelry and Apple products at multiple locations.

But a weekend in which high-end stores in famed shopping districts were hit by large and seemingly sophisticated theft rings has generated national attention as the holiday shopping season begins and retailers are hoping shoppers finally return as the coronavirus crisis eases.

Gov. Gavin Newsom described the incidents as “people smashing and grabbing, stealing people’s items, creating havoc, terror in the streets.” Newsom said he was speaking not just as governor but as a business owner.

“My business has been broken into three times this year,” said Newsom, who owns a hospitality company including wine shops and restaurants. “I have no empathy, no sympathy for these folks, and they must be held to account.”

The reaction to the thefts has followed now-familiar political lines, with some conservatives blaming California's criminal justice reform policies.

But though the incidents were terrifying to those caught in the middle of them, they don't point to a massive increase in such crimes.

Robberies in 2021 are up 3.2% in Los Angeles compared with 2020, but are 14.1% lower than in 2019. In and around Union Square in San Francisco, robberies fell nearly 5% from 2020 to 2021, while burglaries fell 2.3%.

Still, the lawlessness met with outrage in liberal San Francisco, with some keenly aware of the message it might send.

"What happens when people vandalize and commit those level of crimes in San Francisco? We not only lose those businesses, we lose those jobs," Mayor London Breed told reporters. "We lose that tax revenue that helps to support our economy that helps to support many of the social service programs that we have in the city in the first place. We can't allow that to happen."

Newsom said the state would be more aggressive in helping to catch and prosecute retail-theft rings, and will allocate more money for the job in next year’s budget.

He touted the successes of the state’s retail crime task force, which he reestablished in July amid criticism about his record on criminal justice and a recall campaign that derided him as “soft on crime.”

Newsom said the task force had conducted 773 investigations and recovered nearly \$20 million worth of stolen merchandise.

The California Highway Patrol would immediately increase its presence “in and around areas that are highly trafficked” as the holiday shopping season reaches its apex, the governor added.

Greg Totten, executive director of the California District Attorneys Assn., said most shoplifting cases can be charged only as misdemeanors, even when it is clear that organized retail theft is at work.

“There are now huge hurdles to overcome to demonstrate it rises to the level of organized retail theft,” Totten said. “These poor retailers are suffering. We are not just talking about the big stores and luxury retailers, but small businesses.”

LAPD Capt. Jonathan Tippet, who leads the department’s Robbery-Homicide Division, said it appeared there were multiple groups committing such robberies, some of them copycats inspired by social media. He said the robbers targeting high-end stores have been emboldened by the perception that penalties for crime have dropped. “They are finding this a lucrative enterprise, with consequences that they don’t think are that bad,” Tippet said.

Tippet said it is a trend the LAPD is seeing along with [follow-home robberies](#) and street holdups. “Sooner or later, someone is going to get shot and killed,” Tippet said.

Though Los Angeles as a whole has not seen a surge in robberies, some individual neighborhoods have been hit hard. In the Wilshire Division, which includes much of the hip Melrose Avenue retail corridor, there has been a 20% jump in robberies since 2020.

Beverly Hills police launched a [controversial crackdown](#) last year on Rodeo Drive after merchants complained about rising crime.

The effort is now the subject of lawsuits alleging police deliberately targeted Black shoppers. Ninety people were arrested in the crackdown. [Documents obtained by](#) The Times showed 80 of them were Black, four were Latino, three were white, two were Asian and one was classified as “other.”

Rachel Michelin, president of the California Retailers Assn., said this weekend's thefts were dominating talk in the industry.

“A week ago I would have said it’s the supply chain and the ports, and now this is the big one,” Michelin said. “I’ve heard from legislators, I’ve heard from the governor’s office. ... It’s frustrating because we’ve been kind of ringing the bell on the fact that this is a growing problem in California.”

She said she was working with legislators to target the online marketplace where stolen items are bought and sold. “We need to shut down where they can sell these items,” Michelin said. “If you see some of these products sold at dirt-cheap prices, they’re probably stolen.”

Rick Caruso, a prominent Los Angeles developer whose shopping centers include the Grove, said in an interview hours before the incident at his mall that organized retail heists must be taken seriously.

“The minute you say, ‘We’re going to tolerate some level of crime,’ you send a signal to criminals to test the system,” said Caruso. “The more success they have, the more emboldened they become.”

So far, three people have been arrested in connection with the thefts at the Walnut Creek Nordstrom. Police said they are reviewing surveillance footage to identify other culprits.

In the case of the Louis Vuitton raid in San Francisco, video shows a man running from the store with armfuls of clothes pressed against his chest. Nearby, police run toward an apparent getaway car and pound on it with batons, eventually pulling an occupant out and making an arrest.

At least eight people have been arrested, with surveillance footage expected to lead to more arrests.

San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott said the city is adjusting traffic patterns near high-end stores so thieves could not simply park in front, commit a crime and jump into the getaway car. He said he would also put enough officers in vulnerable areas to prevent a mob from overwhelming store security.

“We are going to do everything we can to put a stop to this craziness,” Scott said.

HEADLINE	11/23 Germany: rise domestic violence reports
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germany-sees-increase-reported-domestic-violence-2020-81346826
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Germany saw a 4.4% increase in known cases of actual or attempted violence against domestic partners last year, the vast majority of them against women, but the figures didn't offer a clear picture of the impact of lockdowns prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, authorities said Tuesday.</p> <p>There were 148,031 reported cases of actual or attempted violence within partnerships in 2020, continuing an upward trend from previous years, said Holger Muench, the head of the Federal Criminal Police Office.</p> <p>More than 80% of the victims were women, and authorities believe a "very significant" number of cases go unreported, Muench added. Last year, 122,537 suspects were arrested, a 3.7% increase over 2019, he said.</p> <p>However, a breakdown by the months in which violence took place didn't allow officials to draw any clear conclusion on the influence of lockdowns in the spring and late autumn, Muench said. There were rises in April and May compared with a year earlier, but declines in November and December.</p> <p>Christine Lambrecht, Germany's minister for women, said a study is being prepared to look into the number of cases that go unreported and why.</p> <p>The head of a telephone service for women suffering from violence, Petra Soechting, said it handled 51,400 cases last year, a 15% increase over 2019. There was a 20% increase in counseling for cases of violence by partners, she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Fife: rise in crime linked to homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/rise-in-crime-linked-to-sprawling-homeless-encampment-in-fife
GIST	<p>FIFE, Wash. — Efforts have begun to clear a homeless camp that police said has become a haven for crime and poses a significant danger to surrounding neighborhoods.</p> <p>There are calls for shots fired nearly every night and assaults and break-ins are on the rise, according to Fife Police. Last week several agencies team up to start addressing the problems. It led to seven arrests and was coupled with outreach teams that met with campers to offer shelter and other services.</p> <p>The property spans about two miles just north of I-5 in Fife. The land is owned by WSDOT and the state agency is prepping it to extend SR167 to the Port of Tacoma. Well over a hundred people are living in cars, RVs and tents through that stretch, and neighbors said the crime connected to the camp is getting worse.</p> <p>"You hear gunshots probably at least once or twice a night, sometimes all the way up until 3 o'clock in the morning," said Chris Stark, who lives on 8th Street E just a short distance from the sprawling encampment.</p> <p>The problems spilling into the surrounding community are affecting nearby businesses too.</p> <p>"The homeless come here and steal from here," said Dwayne Brink, who works at a nearby convenience store.</p> <p>The Pierce County Sheriff's Department released a video of new efforts to remove the encampments and connect people to housing and other help. The video shows mounds of trash and junk cars riddled with bullets. Last week officers arrested seven people, either for outstanding warrants or weapons charges. They have also recovered 40 stolen vehicles on the property so far this year.</p>

	<p>"Fire has responded back there for vehicle fires that are being set and they're stolen," said Pierce Co. Sheriff's Sgt. Darren Moss. "There's a lot of assaults. Theft and burglary. Crime has shot up in the nearby jurisdictions since (the camp) has gotten bigger."</p> <p>Police and crews from WSDOT were joined by outreach workers and last week more than a dozen people accepted services. That includes three families who were placed into tiny homes or other shelter.</p> <p>However, police said many more are turning down offers of help and relocating their camps to other parts of the property.</p> <p>A WSDOT spokesperson said outreach efforts will be ongoing, and once an area is cleared it will be secured so people can't simply move back onto the property.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 West Africa highest number child soldiers
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/africa-violence-united-nations-central-africa-west-africa-d76d1da461535a82e3de1e546a4b9694
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — Trapped in conflicts, the children of West and Central Africa are the most recruited by armed groups in the world and also have the highest number of victims of sexual violence, says a report released Tuesday by the United Nations Children's Fund.</p> <p>For five years the region has seen increased conflicts in which more than 21,000 children have been recruited by government forces and armed groups, says the report. In addition, more than 2,200 children in the region have been victims of sexual violence since 2016, says the report.</p> <p>More than 3,500 children have been abducted, making it the region with the second-highest abductions in the world, said the report.</p> <p>"The numbers and trends are extremely worrying for current and future generations of children," Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF's regional director for West and Central Africa told The Associated Press.</p> <p>"Not only have grave violations against children perpetrated by parties to the conflicts not stopped across West and Central Africa, but we have even seen a spike over the past five years, with a 50% increase in the total number of verified grave violations," she said.</p> <p>Since 2005, when the U.N. established a system to monitor and report on serious violations against children, such as recruitment, abduction, rape and attacks on schools and hospitals, one out of four violations globally was committed in West and Central Africa, said the report.</p> <p>In conflict-affected countries such as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, violence has had devastating humanitarian consequences for children and communities, with the pandemic exacerbating the situation, said the U.N.</p> <p>More than 57 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance, a number that's doubled since last year as a result of conflict and the virus.</p> <p>While some countries have been a concern for nearly a decade or more, there are three new areas of concern: Burkina Faso, Cameroon and the countries surrounding Lake Chad, according to the U.N.'s annual report on children and armed conflict.</p> <p>Conflict in the four countries straddling the Lake Chad basin — Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria — has displaced some 3 million people and in Burkina Faso, where a jihadist insurgency has killed thousands, child recruitment rose at least five-fold this year, up from four documented cases in all of last</p>

	<p>year, according to information seen by the AP in an unpublished report by international aid and conflict experts.</p> <p>During a deadly attack in June in the country's Sahel region where at least 160 people were killed, children were seen alongside jihadists, chanting "Allahu akbar" (God is great in Arabic) as they burned homes.</p> <p>Children associated with armed groups are often exposed to "unbearable levels of violence" and their recruitment can be preceded and followed by other violations such as abduction, sexual violence and the killing and maiming of children, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba told The Associated Press.</p> <p>The U.N. is calling for parties to the conflict to prevent and end violations against children and for perpetrators to be held accountable. It urges aid groups to increase the documentation of violations and to work to prevent and respond to them. UNICEF says that it needs more than \$92 million to protect children in emergencies across West and Central Africa, more than half of which is not yet funded.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Wisconsin parade probe: no terror link
SOURCE	https://www.trtworld.com/americas/early-probe-into-wisconsin-parade-incident-reveals-no-terrorism-link-51906
GIST	<p>US authorities have not found any terrorism link during initial investigations into the deadly Wisconsin Christmas parade incident in which five people were killed.</p> <p>The suspect appeared to be fleeing another crime scene when the vehicle sped through the parade route, CNN reported on Monday, citing multiple law enforcement sources.</p> <p>Although the investigation was in its early stages, authorities have found no connection to terrorism, the sources said.</p> <p>The initial assessment was established after police investigated into what led a suspect to drive a speeding SUV into dozens of people at the parade.</p> <p>On the morning after Sunday's carnage, a pink hat, a lone shoe and candy lay strewn across the main thoroughfare in Waukesha, roughly 20 miles (32 km) west of Milwaukee.</p> <p>Dozens of orange evidence circles were painted on the street and most shops were closed in the city's downtown district.</p> <p>About 40 people were also injured in the incident.</p> <p>Suspect identified</p> <p>On Sunday, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson told reporters that one person was in custody and they found the red sport utility vehicle seen plowing into pedestrians.</p> <p>The FBI is assisting local police in their investigation.</p> <p>Several media reports, citing law enforcement sources, identified the person in custody as Darrell Brooks, 39.</p> <p>A search of online court records showed a recent open case involving a 39-year-old person named Darrell Brooks.</p> <p>According to the court documents, he is charged with restricting or obstructing an officer, bail jumping and battery.</p>

	A \$1,000 cash bond was posted last week, the records show.
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HEADLINE	11/22 SPD busts up Capitol Hill takeover
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2021/11/spd-busts-up-capitol-hill-takeover-as-drivers-burn-rubber-in-pike-pine/
GIST	<p>They were fast and the cops got furious as drivers in souped-up cars and classic rides spun donuts and burned rubber in the middle of Pike/Pine's nightlife scene late Saturday night.</p> <p>Videos from the burst of petrol fumes and Vin Diesel-level testosterone spread across Seattle social media this weekend showing drivers cruising through the area and filling 10th and Pike with clouds of smoke from the noisy burnouts.</p> <p>There were no reported arrests but SPD made several traffic stops in the area around midnight. According to East Precinct radio updates, a new model grey Charger was stopped for possible reckless driving at 11th and Pike and a 1966 classic Chevy was pulled over on E Pine while a 1986 Chevy El Camino was also stopped at 12th Ave near the East Precinct. Someone reportedly threw an object at a police cruiser during the response but no damage was reported. An offer to send extra officers to the area was declined as responding SPD units reported the scene was clearing a little after midnight.</p> <p>Saturday night's takeover follows other so-called "sideshow" incidents in the city and on Capitol Hill this year. In March, CHS reported on a sideshow incident in which one driver was busted for DUI. At the time, police said that the dangerous activities fall under the state's reckless driving statutes. Unlike municipalities to the north and south of the city, Seattle does not have specific drag racing or stunt driving laws.</p> <p>The incident comes as new 4-way stops are being added to key Pike/Pine intersections in efforts to make traffic safer at some of the busiest crossings in the city.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 WA \$3M settlement over slaying in prison
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/washington-to-pay-3-million-settlement-in-alleged-prison-slaying-after-doc-ignored-warnings-about-violent-cellmate/
GIST	<p>Washington state will pay \$3 million to settle a lawsuit by the family of a man killed in prison after the state Department of Corrections failed to heed its own staff's warnings about the man's violent cellmate.</p> <p>Keenan Thomas, 27, was found dead on Oct. 17, 2019, in his cell at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla. The wrongful-death lawsuit filed by his family alleged Thomas had been brutally strangled in the middle of the night by his cellmate, James L. Boyd.</p> <p>The settlement came as the jury trial in the civil case was ongoing in King County Superior Court, including testimony last week from two DOC employees who had advised against placing Boyd with a cellmate due to his history of brutal attacks on other incarcerated men. Officials at DOC headquarters overturned that recommendation without explanation.</p> <p>"I think that the DOC's negligence was obvious to nearly everyone in the courtroom. The citizens of our state expect much more and I hope that the DOC will use this as an opportunity to look within itself and take the steps that are necessary to make sure this doesn't happen again," said Seattle attorney Ed Budge, who represented Thomas' family in the lawsuit, in an interview.</p> <p>The \$3 million settlement is more than double the \$1.4 million paid out by the DOC in legal settlements for the entirety of the state's 2021 fiscal year, according to data tracked by the state's risk-management office.</p>

Despite the large payout, [the settlement agreement](#) included language that the state “has not admitted liability in this case.”

The money from the settlement will be dedicated to paying expenses for Thomas’ four children, with the court determining in later proceedings how the money will be protected for their benefit, Budge said.

“Our deepest sympathies are with the Keenan Thomas family for the pain they suffer,” DOC Secretary Cheryl Strange said in a written statement. “We know a settlement can never truly compensate for the pain of losing a family member. We sincerely hope this resolution brings some solace to the Thomas family in the years to come.”

A DOC spokesperson did not immediately respond to questions as to whether the case will spur changes to the agency’s review process on whether to house incarcerated people in single or double cells.

Thomas, a Pasco resident, had started serving a sentence in March 2019 on domestic-violence related convictions, but with good behavior was due for release next summer. Before his death, he had been taking community college classes and was looking forward to an approved transfer to a minimum-security unit at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center.

He was placed in a cell with Boyd, who was serving more than 20 years in prison for convictions including assault, kidnapping and witness tampering connected with the shooting of a man in Moses Lake.

While in Grant County Jail in September 2014, Boyd attacked a sleeping cellmate, yanking him out of bed and choking him. He later assaulted a man at Clallam Bay Corrections Center. DOC screeners cited those incidents in recommending Boyd not be housed with another person in a cell — a call that was reversed by a committee at DOC headquarters.

Thomas was found dead in the top bunk of the cell he shared with Boyd in the evening of Oct. 17, wrapped tightly in a sheet and with his neck at an unnatural angle, according to police and DOC reports. Officers at the scene said they saw a pile of bloody linen or clothing on the floor, and a bloodstained jacket draped over Thomas.

Though Thomas had almost certainly been killed the previous night — some time after he and Boyd entered their cell at 8:34 p.m. and the next morning when Boyd exited alone at 5 a.m. — prison guards did not notice him dead in his bunk until after 5 p.m., despite hourly tier checks.

When they finally found Thomas motionless in his bunk, he was cold to the touch and his body was rigid. But DOC officers and medics pulled his body from the bunk and attempted CPR and cut into his throat to try to insert a breathing tube.

The disturbance of the potential murder scene “frustrated” efforts by a medical examiner to conclusively establish Thomas’ cause of death, according to records of the investigation, complicating a decision on whether to prosecute Boyd.

Boyd was found sitting on the cell’s toilet, his shirt up over his nose, wringing his hands, officers reported. He did not speak with investigators.

A Walla Walla police detective concluded last year there was enough evidence to charge Boyd with second-degree murder. James Nagle, the Walla Walla County prosecuting attorney, said in September the case was still under review. As of Monday, no charges had been filed.

	<p>Despite the unresolved criminal decision, the state’s attorneys in the civil case over Thomas’ death forfeited their right to dispute Boyd’s culpability in the civil lawsuit — because they blew a court deadline to respond to a key legal motion.</p> <p>Budge said the settlement in the trial came after he had presented most of his case, and prior to an assistant state attorney general mounting the defense response this week.</p> <p>“Undoubtedly, the state’s decision makers were watching the course of trial,” Budge said, citing “very impactful” testimony from the DOC staffers who explained in detail how they arrived at their recommendation to avoid placing Boyd in a double cell.</p> <p>Teresa Alvarado, Thomas’ mother, who spoke on the phone with her son the night before he was found dead, also testified at length last Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>“He (Thomas) was supposed to be in there for a short period of time. And he served a life sentence,” she said in an interview in September.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Organized thieves hit Bay Area stores
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/organized-thieves-hit-high-end-bay-area-stores-amid-trend/
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Groups of thieves, some carrying crowbars and hammers, smashed glass cases and window displays and ransacked high-end stores throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, stealing jewelry, sunglasses, suitcases and other merchandise before fleeing in waiting cars during a weekend of brazen organized theft that shocked holiday shoppers and prompted concerns about the busy retail season.</p> <p>The thefts are believed to be part of sophisticated criminal networks that recruit mainly young people to steal merchandise in stores throughout the country then sell it in online marketplaces. The thefts are ratcheting up as the holiday shopping season gets underway, experts and officials said.</p> <p>“We’re not talking about someone who needs money or needs food. These are people who go out and do this is for high profit, and for the thrill,” said Ben Dugan, president of the Coalition of Law Enforcement and Retail.</p> <p>The weekend robberies started in San Francisco Friday around 8 p.m., when packs of people broke into stores including Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Bloomingdale’s in the downtown area and in Union Square, a posh shopping district popular with tourists that was teeming with holiday shoppers.</p> <p>Videos of the chaotic scene posted on social media by witnesses showed police officers dragging one suspect from a waiting car and people running with merchandise in their arms or dragging suitcases.</p> <p>The flash mobs are usually organized by local people who recruit their crews and send them to steal specific merchandise requested by criminal organizations throughout the country, Dugan said.</p> <p>Those who do the stealing get paid between \$500 and \$1,000 to take as much as they can and bring it back to organizers who ship it to other parts of the country.</p> <p>“Crew bosses organize them, they’ll give him the crowbars, and in some cases even rent them cars, or provide them with escape routes or a list of products to actually go out and steal. It looks very chaotic but it’s actually very well organized,” Dugan said.</p> <p>Gov. Gavin Newsom said his office met with retailers over the weekend who asked for more police patrols.</p> <p>“You will see substantially more starting today, in and around areas that are highly trafficked and coming into the holiday season Black Friday in shopping malls,” he told reporters Monday at an event in San Francisco.</p>

He said the California Highway Patrol immediately stepped up patrols along nearby highway corridors following the thefts this weekend and asked local officials how they could help.

In July, Newsom signed a law that allows prosecutors to charge those who work with others to steal merchandise. He said this year's state budget included millions of dollars for local officials to address retail theft and his January budget proposal will include an "exponential increase of support to help cities and counties."

"My business has been broken into three times this year," he said. "I have no empathy, no sympathy for these folks, and they must be held to account." Newsom owns two wine shops in San Francisco.

Most of the flash mob robberies had been happening in stores near highways in suburbs where police response can be slower. But last year, the packs of robbers took advantage of protests following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and ransacked stores in several cities, including San Francisco, Dugan said.

"It was meant to look like looting, but it really wasn't. It's a criminal entity employing other people to steal for them so they can profit by selling it online," he said.

Retailers lose about \$65 billion each year to organized theft, the bulk stolen by professional thieves. Criminal flash mobs are part of a growing national trend, he said.

Last week, fourteen suspects went into a Louis Vuitton store in Oak Brook, a Chicago suburb, pulled large plastic bags from their coats and filled them with clothing and other items, stealing more than \$120,000 in merchandise, police said.

The National Retail Federation said a recent survey found stores are seeing an increase in organized thefts and perpetrators being more aggressive.

Experts said state laws raising the threshold for what constitutes a felony and the ease of reselling stolen goods online are contributing to the increase in brash robberies.

Following Friday's thefts, San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott said officers arrested six men and two women, all young adults, and seized two guns and two vehicles. They are mostly residents of the Bay Area and some are known to San Francisco police, Scott said, adding that he expects more suspects will be arrested in the coming days.

Car access to the streets in Union Square will soon be limited and the area will be flooded with police officers, Scott said.

"We will do what we need to do to put an end to this madness," Scott said at a news conference Saturday.

Hours later, about 80 people, some wearing ski masks and wielding crowbars, ransacked a Nordstrom at an outdoor mall in Walnut Creek 20 miles (32 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco, assaulting employees and stealing merchandise before fleeing in waiting cars, police and witnesses said.

Two employees were assaulted and one was hit with pepper spray during what police called a "clearly a planned event" Saturday in the downtown shopping district in the city. Walnut Creek police said they arrested two suspects and recovered a gun.

Similar scenes of young people wearing hoodies and masks were repeated Sunday in jewelry, sunglasses and clothing stores in the cities of Hayward and San Jose, police said.

	<p>In Hayward, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) east of San Francisco, about 10 people walked into a jewelry store inside a mall Sunday evening, smashed glass cases, and stole jewelry. Witnesses said the thieves then got into waiting cars.</p> <p>Around the same time, packs of thieves ransacked a sunglasses store and a Lululemon store in San Jose, stealing nearly \$50,000 in merchandise, San Jose police Sgt. Christian Camarillo said Monday.</p> <p>The group that targeted the Lululemon store included two women and two men, including one who had a “visible gun in his waistband,” he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 South Seattle shooting: 1 dead, 1 injured
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/shooting-deadly-seattle-baker-police/281-2d277c67-08fc-469d-9a9b-681bf93f8149
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — One person is dead and another suffered life-threatening injuries Sunday in a shooting in south Seattle.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department responded to the area of Martin Luther King Jr. Way S and Rainier Avenue S around 10 p.m. for a report of shots fired.</p> <p>Officers arrived on scene and found two people with serious injuries.</p> <p>SPD and medics with the Seattle Fire Department attempted life-saving measures on the two men, but one died from his injuries.</p> <p>The other man was taken to Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>Detectives are continuing to investigate the scene.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Covid outbreak Clark Co. jail
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/About-25-inmates-COVID-19-positive-at-SW-16643004.php
GIST	<p>VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — About two dozen people lodged in a southwest Washington jail have tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>Clark County Jail Chief Phil Sample estimated as of Monday morning that between 20 to 25 inmates tested positive out of a facility population of about 340. That means about 7% of the in-custody population tested positive, The Columbian reported.</p> <p>Sample said staff has isolated the pods with people who have tested positive and that medical staff is checking on them often, if not daily.</p> <p>The case count Monday was the highest since Sample took over as jail chief in July, he said.</p> <p>The jail saw an outbreak in the late fall of 2020, with 44 inmates testing positive for COVID-19 by early December.</p> <p>People in custody are screened for COVID-19 before being booked and they wear masks, according to Sample. He said they’ve been following Clark County Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention protocol.</p> <p>No staff members have tested positive, Sample said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 RCMP arrests pipeline resistance activists
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/3abqyj/wetsuweten-rcmp-arrests-journalists-protesters-pipeline
GIST	<p>Canada's federal police have arrested about 30 people, including Indigenous elders and land defenders and two journalists, during multiple raids on Wet'suwet'en territory in northeastern British Columbia, where a dispute against a natural gas pipeline has been raging for years.</p> <p>According to reports, RCMP descended on a resistance camp on Friday as part of its multi-day raid. The camp, erected on Sept. 25, had stalled Coastal GasLink's efforts to drill a tunnel for their \$6.6 billion pipeline under the sacred Wedzin Kwa river. Two freelance journalists, Amber Bracken and Michael Toledano, were arrested on site. Bracken was on assignment for the Narwhal, an online environmental magazine, and Toledano is a documentary filmmaker who has been on site for years. The journalists are still being detained and are awaiting a bail hearing in Prince George.</p> <p>"RCMP has gone outside the law in its efforts to prevent the press from covering events taking place in the public interest. It is an absolute disgrace," the Canadian Association of Journalists said in a statement Saturday.</p> <p>Last Sunday, pipeline resistance leaders with the Wet'suwet'en Gidimt'en Clan evoked an eviction order, first issued by hereditary chiefs in 2020, to Coastal GasLink workers, giving them eight hours to "peacefully" leave the territory.</p> <p>"Wetlands have been destroyed. Our animals have been sick. We need to protect what is left for all the future generations," said Sleydo', also known as Molly Wickham, a spokesperson with Gidimt'en.</p> <p>After the deadline passed, they seized a Coastal GasLink excavator and dug up a road—the only route that gave access to several work sites and camps housing about 500 people, the Narwhal reported.</p> <p>Four days later, police moved in and enforced a B.C. Supreme Court injunction order, which protects the pipeline's development. According to the Narwhal and APTN, police used canine units and were armed with snipers and assault rifles. Sleydo' was among those arrested out of about 30 Indigenous land defenders and leaders.</p> <p>Wet'suwet'en elected officials have approved the pipeline project, but hereditary chiefs, viewed by many as the rightful leaders, haven't. In early 2020, their supporters blocked critical infrastructure across Canada in a national display of solidarity.</p> <p>According to Sleydo', Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs have never ceded, surrendered, or lost title to their territory in war. "That means that what they say goes," Sleydo' said.</p> <p>Many, including Gidimt'en Clan, say Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs have a constitutional right—affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada's 1997 Delgamuukw decision—to reject energy projects on their territory.</p> <p>The decision affirmed Wet'suwet'en land title rights, but also said they are "not absolute."</p> <p>It's the third year in a row police have enforced injunctions in the area using militarized force.</p> <p>Police told the media they read out the injunction order and issued several warnings before forcibly making arrests. They said they also have had to clear felled trees and equipment from roadways to make them passable for construction workers.</p> <p>Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs issued a joint statement last week condemning the police actions.</p> <p>"RCMP should be assisting flood victims and communities, not out invading our Territory and arresting our peaceful people and supporters," they said.</p>

	The raids occurred as the province grappled with a catastrophic storm that flooded several communities, destroyed highways, and killed at least four people.
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HEADLINE	11/22 Tragedy: fentanyl deaths spike in US
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/22/fentanyl-deaths-spike-us-tragedy
GIST	<p>It was August 2020, and Luca Manuel, 13, was starting eighth grade the following day in Redding, California. He was excited to see his friends; his mother had bought him a stash of masks and school supplies for his first in-person school day in six months.</p> <p>But the week earlier, he'd gotten a root canal, and his mouth still hurt. He sent a message on Snapchat to find marijuana for the pain. Instead, the dealer said he had something better: Percocet.</p> <p>Luca didn't know that the pill, which had been pressed to look like the real pain medication, was actually a counterfeit laced with fentanyl, a substance 30 times more potent than heroin. He died of drug poisoning that afternoon, a video game looping like a ghost across the screen in front of him.</p> <p>More than 100,000 people died from overdoses in the US in a 12-month period ending in April, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>It's the biggest increase ever seen in the US – and it's only rising each month, drug researchers say.</p> <p>Fentanyl is driving the majority of these deaths, associated with at least 60% of the fatal overdoses – a 50% increase in a single year, Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, told the Guardian.</p> <p>"It's devastating," she said. "It's an epidemic within the pandemic." Deaths from fentanyl were already on the rise across the country, but the pandemic supercharged their speed and intensity.</p> <p>It's not unusual to see people turn to drugs or alcohol during times of crisis, Volkow said. "But what we didn't expect was that during that period, there will be a massive increase in the entry of these illicit substances into the country."</p> <p>Dramatically more fentanyl is coming into the US, making the drug supply increasingly dangerous.</p> <p>"The trajectory is up, with no leveling off," Daniel Ciccarone, the Justine Miner endowed professor of addiction medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, said. "There's nothing that says it's slowing down."</p> <p>A "triple wave" of opioids, from pain pills to heroin to fentanyl, is wreaking havoc, he said.</p> <p>"Fentanyl is an extraordinarily potent drug. It was manufactured specifically to be much more potent than morphine," Volkow said. It's also incredibly profitable, she said. "If someone is a drug dealer, they make much more money by selling fentanyl than by selling heroin or selling cocaine."</p> <p>Another alarming trend is arising with the dominance of fentanyl. People who have never used opioids before are dying from a single fatal encounter with fentanyl. "They are not opioid users, and they don't know that these drug are contaminated and they die with one single exposure," Volkow said.</p> <p>Even for those who are accustomed to taking opioids, it can be difficult to judge a safe dosage of fentanyl. Most experienced drug users don't prefer it, but as prescription pills and heroin became harder to get, dealers have increasingly begun mixing fentanyl into the supply.</p> <p>Experts and grieving families are seeing alarming numbers of people, even children, taking what they think are legitimate Percocet or Xanax pills with friends.</p>

“Counterfeit pills are a big part of the story,” Ciccarone said. High-quality pill presses can make the substance look like a legitimate medication. “They look for all the world like the real thing.”

Fentanyl has circulated along the east coast for about a decade, but it’s now moving out west, where “people are not accustomed to it, and don’t know how to use it”, he said. While fentanyl overdoses were first concentrated primarily among white populations, communities of color are now being hit harder than before.

“It’s going into new groups and causing devastation,” Ciccarone said.

There are some solutions, however. A medication, buprenorphine, can help those who are addicted to opioids and help prevent overdoses, and inexpensive test strips can detect the presence of fentanyl in other drugs. Housing stability can also help prevent substance use.

Fentanyl overdoses are reversible with the quick use of a medication called naloxone – but the [price of naloxone has increased dramatically this year](#), creating a shortage for many of those who need the medication the most. “We just need more of it,” Ciccarone said.

The Biden administration recently announced harm reduction policies in order to stem the wave of overdoses, an encouraging move, Ciccarone said.

It’s also important to address the fundamental inequalities frequently driving the overdose crisis, Ciccarone said. “We’ll continue to have wave over wave over wave of drug overdoses unless we address the inequities in our society. It’s a wake-up call, and civilizations do fall if they don’t address the instabilities in their population.”

Amanda Faith Eubanks, Luca’s mother, remembers her son as a kind, sweet, trusting kid. On the morning of his last day, she shopped for groceries because he had asked to cook meals for a nearby homeless camp. “He thrived in service for others,” she told the Guardian. “He was just the kid that you could go to on any bad day. He had a heart of gold.”

“Fentanyl is unlike anything anybody’s seen before,” Eubanks said. “It’s a public safety crisis.”

Detectives in Luca’s case have charged the dealer with murder; his preliminary hearing will begin later this month. And Eubanks has begun speaking up, creating a support group for families grieving loved ones lost to fentanyl poisoning.

“I just don’t want more people dying from this,” she said. “I didn’t want any more moms to ever feel this.”

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HEADLINE	11/22 San Diego: record seizure meth, fentanyl
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/22/record-breaking-amounts-of-meth-and-fentanyl-seized-in-san-diego
GIST	<p>A trucker was arrested after trying to smuggle record-breaking amounts of methamphetamine and fentanyl from Mexico into the US, federal prosecutors said on Monday.</p> <p>More than 17,500 pounds (7,930 kg) of meth and 389 pounds (176 kg) of fentanyl were discovered last Thursday, hidden inside a tractor-trailer at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry in San Diego, according to a statement from the US Attorney’s Office.</p> <p>The seizures are the largest for either drug in the US for both 2020 and 2021, the statement said.</p> <p>Carlos Martin Quintana-Arias, a Mexican citizen, faces federal drug charges. It wasn’t known Monday if he has an attorney.</p>

	<p>The driver's manifest indicated his truck contained auto body parts, but "anomalies" were detected in the trailer by an X-ray machine and a drug-sniffing dog, according to the statement.</p> <p>The arrest comes as overdose deaths in the US are surging, and fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is being blamed for this increase. The drug, which is far more potent than heroin, often finds its way into other substances such as painkillers or cocaine.</p> <p>The number of drug overdose deaths in the US rose nearly 30% during a 12-month stretch of the pandemic, compared with the previous year, according to recently released data from the CDC. In the past year, fentanyl was involved in more than 60% of the overdose deaths.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 D.C. \$7500 reward for illegal gun tips
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/22/washington-dc-officials-offer-7500-reward-illegal/
GIST	<p>D.C. officials on Monday announced a \$7,500 reward for tips on illegal guns as the city grapples with rising homicides.</p> <p>The city already offers up to \$2,500 for information leading to the recovery of an illegal gun and now it will triple that reward for tips specifically resulting in the arrest of anyone possessing or trafficking "ghost" guns or illegally modified firearms.</p> <p>The news comes less than a week after the nation's capital recorded its 199th homicide this year — surpassing last year's tally of 198, the highest rate in 16 years.</p> <p>The initiative is a partnership between the Metropolitan Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that will run through the end of this year.</p> <p>Charlie Patterson, special agent in charge of the Washington Field Division of the ATF, said during a news conference that it is "a plea for help."</p> <p>"We at ATF want the D.C. community to know that we are extremely concerned about what is going on in the District because we as community members live, work and raise our children here also," Mr. Patterson said.</p> <p>He added that 25% of all firearms and shell cases recovered in the city are ballistically linked to other shootings, including homicides and in serious assaults.</p> <p>The boosted reward will target illegal firearms including so-called ghost guns, or homemade guns without serial numbers, and guns with conversion devices commonly referred to as "auto sears" or "glock switches."</p> <p>Greggory Pemberton, president of the D.C. Police Union, told The Washington Times on Monday that, "It is great to see the city acknowledging the necessity of law enforcement and the need for proactive efforts to reduce crime, but gun tips are only a small part of the solution to violent crime."</p> <p>The police department, he said, currently has about 3,400 officers — which is 400 fewer than it had in the beginning of 2020.</p> <p>"In order to properly address the threat of violent crime in this city, we need to get our staffing levels back to where they should be," Mr. Pemberton said. "This is the most important aspect of reducing violence."</p> <p>City statistics as of Monday show homicides are up 12% compared to the same time last year when 178 were recorded.</p>

	<p>A police spokesperson said Monday that the department has recovered more than 2,000 illegal firearms this year — at least 42 of which had Glock switches and more than 300 of which are ghost guns.</p> <p>Last week, the D.C. Council voted to change the city’s law prohibiting ghost guns in response to a federal lawsuit filed in September which argues the law is too “far-reaching.”</p> <p>Under the current law, a ghost gun is defined as “a firearm that, after the removal of all parts other than a receiver, is not as detectable ... by walk-through metal detectors.”</p> <p>When all parts besides the receiver are removed from a gun, all that is left is the polymer frame — which is not made of metal. Thus, the suit claims the city “has apparently unwittingly made ... existing polymer frame handguns illegal.”</p> <p>The council, however, approved an amendment to the law that would require guns with an attached barrel, trigger and firing mechanism to be detectable, even if the receiver is polymer-based. It would also add a legal process for residents to own homemade firearms.</p> <p>The proposed changes must receive final approval from Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Exonerated 72yrs later: Groveland Four
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/groveland-four-exonerated-florida.html
GIST	<p>Four Black men wrongly charged with raping a white woman more than 70 years ago in Florida were exonerated on Monday, bringing an end to a saga that has shadowed their families for decades.</p> <p>The accused — Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd and Ernest Thomas, known as the Groveland Four — died before Florida officials re-examined the case, which a prosecutor said lacked due process and would not be tried today.</p> <p>It all began on July 16, 1949, when a 17-year-old white woman and her estranged husband told the police that after their car broke down in Lake County, Fla., the four men had stopped to provide help, then took the woman from the car and raped her.</p> <p>The accusation left a trail of destruction. Mr. Thomas was killed by a mob after fleeing Lake County. Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd, both of whom were World War II veterans, were shot by Willis McCall, the Lake County Sheriff, while they were being taken to a pretrial hearing before their cases were retried in 1951. The sheriff claimed that the men, who were in handcuffs, had tried to escape.</p> <p>Mr. Shepherd died and Mr. Irvin pretended to be dead and survived. Mr. Irvin later provided crucial testimony about the events that led up to the shooting. He died in 1969, a year after he was granted parole.</p> <p>Mr. Greenlee, who was 16 when he was charged, was the only one to survive past 1969. He died in 2012, at 78.</p> <p>Heidi Davis, a Lake County circuit court administrative judge, on Monday set aside the judgments and sentences for Mr. Greenlee and Mr. Irvin. The court dismissed the indictments of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Shepherd, whose cases had not been tried, or were being retried, when they were killed.</p> <p>Carol Greenlee, the daughter of Mr. Greenlee, said she had been seeking her father’s exoneration since the late 1960s, even though he forbid her to do it because the case was so painful for him. Ms. Greenlee, 72, said the court’s ruling was the end “of feeling that nobody is listening, that you are inside a prison of your own that you need to break out but you don’t know how because all the doors are locked.”</p> <p>The state attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit, Bill Gladson, filed a motion to dismiss the charges after the case was referred to his office by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in July.</p>

In August, investigators spoke with a grandson of Jesse Hunter, the state attorney who prosecuted the case. Broward Hunter said he found correspondence in his grandfather's law office that convinced him that Jesse Hunter and the judge presiding over the retrial knew that no rape had occurred.

Investigators were also skeptical about evidence provided by James Yates, a sheriff's deputy who was the state's primary witness in the 1949 trial and the 1951 retrial.

While families of the accused were haunted by the case for decades, it took two books to spur a re-examination: "[Legal Lynching: The Sad Saga of the Groveland Four](#)," by Gary Corsair, published in 2004, and "[Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America](#)," by Gilbert King, which won a Pulitzer Prize after it was published in 2012.

[In April 2017](#), the state of Florida formally apologized to the families of the four men. In December 2018, the Department of Law Enforcement was ordered to review the case. The four men were pardoned by Gov. Ron DeSantis [in January 2019](#).

At the time of the pardon, Norma Padgett, the woman who said she was raped, [testified](#) at a clemency board hearing that she did not want them pardoned. She could not be reached for comment on Monday.

In October, Mr. Gladson filed a motion to clear all four men of the charges.

He [wrote in his motion](#) that today, no "fair-minded" prosecutor would even consider filing the charges and that "the evidence strongly suggests that the sheriff, the judge and the prosecutor all but ensured guilty verdicts in this case."

"These officials, disguised as keepers of the peace and masquerading as ministers of justice, disregarded their oaths, and set in motion a series of events that forever destroyed these men, their families and a community," Mr. Gladson wrote. "I have not witnessed a more complete breakdown of the criminal justice system, nor do I ever expect I will again."

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HEADLINE	11/22 US returns 900 intercepted artifacts to Mali
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/arts/design/us-mali-looted-antiquities-returned.html
GIST	<p>More than 900 artifacts intercepted in an illegal shipment have been returned to the government of Mali, U.S. officials said on Monday. Homeland Security agents originally confiscated the items, which included ceremonial and mortuary objects, some dating back to the Neolithic period, at the Port of Houston in 2009. Officials described the discovery at the port, which is one of the busiest in the country, as the equivalent of finding a needle in a haystack.</p> <p>Mark Dawson, the investigator who oversaw the search, said in a statement Monday that "a nation's cultural property and antiquities define who they are as a people." He added: "No one has the right to loot or destroy that heritage and history." Homeland Security agents would "aggressively target anyone who pilfers the priceless cultural treasures of a nation," according to the statement.</p> <p>The artifacts' journey began in March 2009 when U.S. Customs and Border Protection alerted the investigative branch of Homeland Security of a suspicious container at the port. The container originated in Mali with papers claiming that it held reproductions of cultural items. Upon inspection, the items appeared to be authentic. Susan McIntosh, an anthropologist at Rice University, researched the antiquities and released a report later that year.</p> <p>In 2011, the United States started the process of returning the artifacts to Mali, but the effort paused when the West African country fell into a period of civil unrest and economic strain, Homeland Security officials said. In June 2020, the State Department provided Mali with a grant to finance the return of the artifacts and their eventual exhibition there.</p>

	<p>“We put a great deal of care into culture,” Mohamed Traore, an adviser with Mali’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations, said in an interview. “We considered these objects as part of our history that was not present anymore.”</p> <p>Traore said that the U.S. authorities notified the Malian government about the return of the looted artifacts this year and that repatriation negotiations then resumed. He explained that the artifacts, which were handed over to diplomats today, would be immediately returned to Mali, where the country’s Ministry of Culture would assess them. Their final destination will be museums, “including the National Museum of Mali in the capital, Bamako,” he added.</p> <p>Malian regulations require that anyone seeking to export artifacts submit the objects for certification by the National Museum. Since 2007, the United States has upheld an agreement with Mali to protect cultural property. In the last decade, however, the country has seen increased looting of its cultural heritage by terrorist organizations and local militias. A series of coups has also weakened the government’s ability to enforce the law. Earlier this year, military officials ousted the country’s interim civilian leaders just nine months after the previous president was forced out.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 DOJ settlement Parkland shooting victims
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/parkland-shooting-victims-settlement.html
GIST	<p>MIAMI — The Justice Department will pay about \$130 million to 40 survivors and families of victims of the 2018 massacre at a high school in Parkland, Fla., over the F.B.I.’s failure to properly investigate two tips in the months before the shooting that suggested the gunman might open fire at a school.</p> <p>One of the tips, six weeks before the shooting, detailed how the gunman, Nikolas Cruz, was posting on Instagram about amassing weapons and ammunition. “I know he’s going to explode,” the woman said on the F.B.I.’s tip line, adding that she feared Mr. Cruz, then 19, “was going to slip into a school and start shooting the place up.”</p> <p>Forty days later, Mr. Cruz did just that, killing 17 people and injuring 17 others at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where he had previously been a student.</p> <p>The F.B.I. acknowledged two days after the Feb. 14, 2018, shooting that it had received the tips about Mr. Cruz but had not investigated them in accordance with its protocols. Mr. Cruz, now 23, pleaded guilty to 17 counts of murder and 17 counts of attempted murder last month. He is scheduled to go on trial early next year. A jury will decide if he faces capital punishment or life imprisonment.</p> <p>“Although the financial details of the agreement are presently confidential, it is an historic settlement and the culmination of the Parkland families’ long and arduous efforts toward truth and accountability,” the law firm representing the families, Podhurst Orseck, said in a statement.</p> <p>The Justice Department said in court papers that it was in the process of completing a settlement, without disclosing the amount. Two people familiar with the case said it would total about \$130 million, though the precise number could change before the final agreement.</p> <p>The revelation that the F.B.I. had received information about the gunman ahead of the shooting devastated victims’ families and the Parkland community in the days immediately following the shooting. Fred Guttenberg was picking out a casket for his 14-year-old daughter, Jaime, two days after the shooting when he got an urgent call from an F.B.I. agent working with the families. The agent delivered the difficult news.</p> <p>“Are you telling me that if the F.B.I. did not make a mistake and did their job a month sooner, my daughter would still be alive today?” Mr. Guttenberg asked the agent, according to the lawsuit Mr. Guttenberg and the 39 other families eventually filed against the bureau.</p> <p>“I’m afraid so, sir,” the agent replied, according to Mr. Guttenberg.</p>

The first tip had come five months before the shooting, in September 2017, when [a bail bondsman in Mississippi reported](#) that a commentator with the user name “nikolas cruz” had left a disturbing message on his YouTube channel: “Im going to be a professional school shooter,” it read. Two F.B.I. agents interviewed the bondsman about the comment but found no particular information linking it to a specific person and closed the inquiry the following month.

The second tip came on Jan. 5, 2018, from a woman who called the F.B.I.’s tip line and gave the bureau information about Mr. Cruz’s social media accounts and troubled family life and [school record](#). She mentioned that he had posted photos of mutilated animals and that his mother had died recently — both considered by experts to be warning signs or triggers for potential shooters.

“I do believe something’s going to happen,” said the woman, who identified herself as a family friend. Mr. Guttenberg and his wife, Jennifer Guttenberg, sued the F.B.I. for negligence in November 2018 and were eventually joined by 39 other families. They argued that the shooting had been “completely preventable.”

The case had been scheduled to go to trial in January 2022. In its court filing on Monday, the Justice Department asked the court for a stay of all upcoming hearings and deadlines pending completion of the settlement.

“Once those details are finalized and approval is granted, the plaintiffs will ask that the court dismiss these actions in their entirety,” the Justice Department filing said.

The Justice Department had no further comment.

Last month, victims’ families [reached a \\$25 million settlement](#) with the Broward County school district.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Vehicle ramming driver lengthy police file
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/22/us/wisconsin-waukesha-parade.html
GIST	<p>WAUKESHA, Wis. — He had been arrested time and again since he was a teenager, accused of battery and domestic abuse and resisting the police. Earlier this month, prosecutors in Milwaukee said, he intentionally ran over a woman he knew with a maroon Ford Escape.</p> <p>But Darrell E. Brooks, 39, was quickly freed from jail on bond after prosecutors requested what they now say was an inappropriately low bail. By Sunday evening, as a Christmas parade was making its way through downtown Waukesha, Wis., the police were coming for Mr. Brooks again after receiving a report of a domestic dispute involving a knife.</p> <p>But before Waukesha officers ever reached the site of that dispute, a maroon Ford Escape toppled barriers along the parade route. The police said Mr. Brooks was the driver, and that he sped toward the marching bands and the smiling families and the troupe of “Dancing Grannies” strolling down Main Street, charging on even as he mowed down children and octogenarians. One police officer fired his gun at Mr. Brooks but quickly stopped, Chief Daniel Thompson said, fearful of hitting someone in the crowd.</p> <p>Five adults died in the vehicle attack and at least 48 people, including children, were injured, some critically. Within minutes, what the mayor described as “a Norman Rockwell type of Christmas parade” in suburban Milwaukee had become a mass casualty incident, with firefighters who were watching the parade with their families suddenly tending to the wounded on the street.</p> <p>At a hospital not far from the parade route, off-duty doctors rushed to the emergency room on Sunday night. Among the dead were three members of the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, and the husband of a member of that group.</p>

“That parade became a nightmare,” Mayor Shawn Reilly said Monday as investigators continued to comb through a downtown that parade-goers had fled in such a hurry that they left coolers, strollers and dozens of lawn chairs behind. “Last night, lives were lost during the middle of what should have been a celebration.”

Chief Thompson, of the Waukesha police, said there had been no pursuit by officers before Mr. Brooks steered onto the parade route and no indication that the attack was motivated by terrorism. While the chief said that Mr. Brooks intentionally struck people with the vehicle, he was not able to say whether he drove down the parade route in a rush to escape the earlier confrontation or in a fit of fury.

Mr. Brooks was expected to appear in court on Tuesday afternoon after police referred five counts of first-degree intentional homicide to prosecutors. It was not clear whether he had a lawyer.

Prosecutors in Milwaukee County said they had erred this month in recommending a \$1,000 cash bail in the case in which Mr. Brooks was accused, among other things, of running over the woman with his car in the parking lot of a gas station, after which she was hospitalized.

“The state’s bail recommendation in this case was inappropriately low in light of the nature of the recent charges and the pending charges against Mr. Brooks,” the Milwaukee County District Attorney’s Office said in an unsigned statement, which added that an investigation was underway into how that decision was made. It said the bail amount was not “consistent with the risk assessment of the defendant prior to setting of bail.”

John T. Chisholm, the district attorney in Milwaukee, did not immediately respond to an interview request. Mr. Chisholm, a Democrat, is a longtime prosecutor and one of [the early proponents of using real case data to address racial disparities](#) in prosecution.

In Waukesha, a usually quiet suburb with about 72,000 residents, people were still coming to terms with the carnage. Public schools were closed, City Hall opened only for a news conference and police cars had cordoned off the parade route during the morning rush hour.

Steve Howard, chief of the Waukesha Fire Department, said every on-duty member of his agency responded to the scene on Sunday, along with several off-duty members who had been lining the streets to watch.

“I’d liken it to a war zone,” Chief Howard said, his voice choked with emotion as he recounted the chaotic scene.

Chief Thompson, of the Police Department, said there was no indication that Mr. Brooks knew anyone attending the parade. He said Mr. Brooks had acted alone and that he was arrested near the parade route.

Mr. Brooks had been in and out of the Wisconsin criminal justice system throughout his adult life, racking up arrests in the Milwaukee area for resisting or obstructing an officer, bail jumping, recklessly endangering safety, disorderly conduct and battery, among other charges.

In rap tracks he posted to a SoundCloud profile, he described himself as growing up in a dangerous Milwaukee neighborhood and having trouble with the legal system. In one video he posted online, he appeared to rap alongside a maroon Ford Escape.

The incident in the gas station parking lot occurred on Nov. 2. The woman injured by the vehicle told the police that Mr. Brooks had punched her in the face in a hotel room, then followed her in his S.U.V. into the parking lot, where he hit her with the car.

“Officers observed tire tracks on her left pants leg,” wrote one of the officers, according to a criminal complaint charging him with recklessly endangering the woman, which carries a possible sentence of 10 years in prison.

The woman was treated for injuries that included facial cuts and bruises. The police observed “swelling on her lip and dried blood on her face.”

Mr. Brooks has a long history of domestic abuse allegations and bench warrants in a paternity case, which are typically issued for nonpayment of child support. In February, a judge in Waukesha County issued a warrant for his arrest after he reneged on a monthly agreement to pay a woman in the area \$151 in child support and \$50 in money he owed her, in a case that dates back more than a decade.

In many of his brushes with the law, Mr. Brooks was accused of resisting arrest or attempting to obstruct officers, according to the court records. That pattern held true earlier this month: When the police tried to arrest him, he sprinted into his residence and “closed four doors on officers” before they restrained him, according to a criminal complaint.

Marsha Winters, who said she was a friend and occasional lover to Mr. Brooks, said he had stayed with her briefly over the summer after being released from jail. His time lodging in the family’s basement lasted only a day or two in August, she said.

“I’m just in shock,” Ms. Winters said. “I thought I knew him. I guess you don’t know what people are capable of until they do something like this.”

In Waukesha, residents gathered Monday evening for a vigil at a downtown park as others came to pick up items they left while fleeing the destruction. Chris Gresky, 36, came to claim a wagon, filled with candy and other bagged snacks, that he left behind while running away with his wife and children, past bodies strewn on the ground.

“We saw the car, and knew it wasn’t quite right,” Mr. Gresky said. “We watched it get up on the curb and then kind of go on two wheels.”

“This morning,” Mr. Gresky said, “my 6-year-old was asking ‘Why? Why did he do that?’”

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HEADLINE	11/22 Wisconsin suspect bail raises questions
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/milwaukee-00641efceaf200ce2c3bf5e5200be13
GIST	<p>WAUKESHA, Wis. (AP) — The suspect in a Christmas parade crash in suburban Milwaukee that killed five people was free on \$1,000 bail posted just two days before the deadly event, a fact that is leading to a review of what happened and renewed calls for giving judges more power to set higher bails.</p> <p>One pending case against Darrell Brooks Jr. included an allegation that he deliberately hit a woman with his car in early November after a fight. Prosecutors in Milwaukee County on Monday called their bail recommendation “inappropriately low” given the facts of that case and the Sunday crash, and said they would review it.</p> <p>Julius Kim, a defense attorney and former assistant prosecutor, said the bail could easily have been set more than twice as high.</p> <p>“He was accused of running over the mother of his kid, and to put it at \$1,000 strikes me as low,” Kim said. “It could have been an inexperienced attorney who happened to be reviewing cases that day.”</p> <p>Police said Brooks, 39, was behind the wheel of the SUV that sped through the parade route in Waukesha on Sunday, killing five and injuring 48 others. Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said Brooks was leaving the scene of a domestic dispute that had taken place just minutes earlier.</p> <p>Brooks has been charged with crimes 16 times since 1999 and had two outstanding cases against him at the time of the parade disaster. That included resisting or obstructing an officer, reckless endangering, disorderly conduct, bail jumping and battery for the Nov. 2 incident.</p>

Thompson said police were going to recommend he face five charges of first degree intentional homicide, which is punishable by life in prison.

Legal experts cautioned that one extreme case should not be reason to push for higher bail amounts that would keep poorer defendants behind bars longer while they await trial.

“We don’t want to have a kneejerk reaction here and say ‘Let’s lock up a lot of people pretrial,’” said John Gross, a law professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School and also director of its Public Defender Project.

“I’m sure the district attorney’s office is going to look back at this and ask themselves, ‘Did we get this wrong?’” said Gross, the law school professor. “This is such an extreme incident ... could they reasonably expect he would get behind a vehicle and run people down on a parade route? What would have alerted you to the capacity he would have had for this kind of violence?”

Some Republicans were quick to jump on the case as an example of a broken legal system.

Republican Rebecca Kleefisch, a former Wisconsin lieutenant governor who is running for governor in 2022, called the killings “yet another avoidable tragedy that occurred because a violent career criminal was allowed to walk free and terrorize our community.”

And Republican state Rep. Cindi Duchow said she was reintroducing a constitutional amendment that would change the bail process in Wisconsin to allow judges to consider a defendant’s danger to the community when setting bail. Judges currently are only allowed to consider the possibility that defendants might not show up for a court appearance when setting bail.

“He tried to run over his girlfriend with his car -- that’s attempted murder,” Duchow said. “If you’re a danger to society, you should have to work hard to get out.”

Thompson, the police chief, said that there was no evidence the bloodshed Sunday was a terrorist attack or that Brooks knew anyone in the parade. Brooks acted alone, the chief said.

Brooks had left the site of the domestic disturbance before officers arrived, and was not being chased by police at the time of the crash, according to the chief, who gave no further details on the dispute.

Brooks is an aspiring rapper. On a YouTube page, a video that has since been removed showed him rapping in front of a red Ford SUV resembling the one at the parade. The rapper uses the name MathBoi Fly on his Twitter and other social media accounts.

On Sunday, a joyous scene of marching bands and children dancing in Santa hats and waving pompoms gave way in an instant to screams and the sight of crumpled bodies as the SUV sped through barricades and struck dancers, musicians and others in the community of 72,000.

Police identified those killed as Virginia Sorenson, 79; LeAnna Owen, 71; Tamara Durand, 52; Jane Kulich, 52; and Wilhelm Hospel, 81. Sorenson, Owen and Durand were members the Dancing Grannies club, and Hospel helped out with the group.

“It looked like dummies being thrown in the air,” said Nicole Schneiter, who was there with her children and grandchildren. “It took a second to register, like, ‘Is that what we really just saw?’ And then you looked in the road and there were just people laying in the road.”

At least nine patients, most of them children, were in critical condition Monday at two hospitals, and seven others were reported in serious condition.

	<p>Hundreds gathered at a downtown park Monday night in Waukesha, Wisconsin, for a candlelight vigil in honor of those lost and hurt in a deadly Christmas parade crash a day earlier. A pair of clergy solemnly read the names of those who died. Volunteers handed out sandwiches, hot chocolate, and candles at the vigil, which was attended by interfaith leaders and elected officials.</p> <p>“We are parents. We are neighbors. We are hurting. We are angry. We are sad. We are confused. We are thankful. We are all in this together. We are Waukesha Strong,” said a tearful Amanda Medina Roddy with the Waukesha school district.</p> <p>The chief said that police weren’t pursuing Brooks before he entered the parade route, but an officer did fire a shot to try to stop him. The officer stopped firing because of the danger to others. Brooks was not injured.</p> <p>Mayor Shawn Reilly described the parade as a “Norman Rockwell-type” event that “became a nightmare.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/22 Mistaken identity arrest; man sues Hawaii
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/man-locked-mistaken-identity-sues-hawaii-81333750
GIST	<p>HONOLULU -- A formerly homeless man who ended up in a mental institution for more than two years because of mistaken identity is suing the state and various Honolulu police officers, Hawaii public defenders and doctors.</p> <p>Joshua Spriestersbach's attorneys say in a lawsuit filed Sunday in U.S. District Court in Honolulu that Hawaii officials haven't responded to a petition seeking to correct his records to ensure the error never happens again.</p> <p>The petition filed in state court in August laid bare Spriestersbach's bizarre plight, which started with him falling asleep on a sidewalk. He was homeless and hungry while waiting in a long line for food outside a Honolulu shelter in 2017.</p> <p>When a police officer roused him awake, Spriestersbach thought he was being arrested for the city’s ban on sitting or laying on public sidewalks.</p> <p>The officer mistook him for a man named Thomas Castleberry, who had a warrant out for his arrest for allegedly violating probation in a 2006 drug case.</p> <p>Despite Spriestersbach's protests that he wasn't Castleberry, he ended up in the Hawaii State Hospital, where he was forced to take psychiatric drugs, the petition said. When a doctor looked into his case and verified the mix-up, officials tried to cover up the mistake by quietly setting him free with just 50 cents to his name, his lawyers said.</p> <p>Spriestersbach’s lawsuit alleges false imprisonment, intentional infliction of emotional distress, malicious prosecution, abuse of process and other claims.</p> <p>“The Department of the Attorney General has not been served with the complaint and have not yet had the opportunity to review it with our client agencies,” Gary Yamashiroya, special assistant to the Hawaii attorney general, said Monday.</p> <p>The Honolulu Police Department “is currently reviewing department policies and procedures to determine if changes are needed, Interim Chief Rade Vanic said. “We are also continuing to work with city attorneys to fully investigate and address the allegations in the lawsuit.”</p> <p>State Public Defender James Tabe said Monday his office had no comment.</p>

Spriestersbach's lawyers hope the lawsuit will lead to procedural changes to ensure proper identification of people in custody, said Kenneth Lawson, co-director of the Hawaii Innocence Project. They're also seeking monetary damages, to be determined in court.

The lawsuit sheds new light on factors that led to the mix-up, starting with an encounter with officers that happened years earlier.

Spriestersbach was arrested in 2011 for sleeping in a stairwell of a Honolulu middle school. It's unclear why, but he gave the last name Castleberry, which was his grandfather's last name, his lawyers said. He didn't give a first name.

Thomas Castleberry's 2009 warrant came up, but police were able to determine Spriestersbach wasn't Thomas Castleberry.

Spriestersbach was arrested again in 2015 for sleeping in a park. He gave his real name, but Thomas Castleberry appeared as an alias. Authorities checked fingerprints and again determined he wasn't Castleberry.

During his 2017 arrest, Spriestersbach gave his real name, but Thomas Castleberry still showed up as an alias. This time, he was arrested for the warrant.

Even though he was fingerprinted and photographed at a jail, no one checked the prints or photo against Thomas Castleberry's, the lawsuit said.

Castleberry, who isn't related to Spriestersbach, is in custody with the Alaska Department of Corrections, with an expected release date in 2022, the lawsuit said. The Alaska Public Defender Agency, which has represented Castleberry, declined to comment Monday.

Police and others, including Spriestersbach's public defenders and doctors, all had access to information that would have properly identified both men, the lawsuit said.

"Prior to January 2020, not a single person acted on the available information to determine that Joshua was telling the truth – that he was not Mr. Castleberry," the lawsuit said. "Instead, they determined that Joshua was delusional and incompetent just because he refused to admit that he was Mr. Castleberry and refused to acknowledge Mr. Castleberry's crimes."

Spiestersbach now lives with his sister in Vermont. His lawyers said he declined to be interviewed for this story.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Teens arrested in Aurora school shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/teens-arrested-shooting-suburban-denver-high-school-81331326
GIST	<p>AURORA, Colo. -- Police in the Denver suburb of Aurora have arrested three teenagers in connection with the shooting of three students in a high school parking lot on Friday, a Colorado newspaper reported Monday. A television station quoted the city's police chief as saying that gang involvement was suspected.</p> <p>Police arrested one 16-year-old boy late Friday and two more 16-year-old boys on Sunday, Sentinel Colorado reported. All face charges of first-degree attempted murder.</p> <p>Friday's shooting at Hinkley High School injured two boys, ages 16 and 17, and a 17-year-old girl, police said. None of the injuries was life-threatening and the suspects and victims have not been identified.</p> <p>The shooting came four days after six students from another school in the same Denver suburb, Aurora Central High School, were wounded by bullets fired from at least one car driving by a park near the school. Police have not arrested anyone yet in the earlier shootings. The two schools are 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) apart.</p>

Aurora Police Chief Vanessa Williams said Sunday that it appeared the two shootings were not connected, KDVR-TV reported, and that investigators believe there was gang involvement in the Hinkley shooting.

“It doesn’t look like the Hinkley shooting is connected to the Central shooting, so we have a problem,” Wilson said. “There is a gang nexus to this Hinkley shooting.”

She also issued a warning to criminals: “For those who didn’t care and just shoot in the middle of the day, while kids were returning from lunch, we’re coming for you, we are.”

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